

File: A/Chaves



spring

1976



MWCC LITERARY MAGAZINE





i

CONTENTS  
SPRING 1976

	Page	
The Jellyfish	1	Robert Shattuck
Hot Dog Rock	3	Richard Girouard
We Are All Babes	4	Mel Poirier
Beginnings	5	Lynne Deeds
Eagle	6	Michael Gaston
Sillie	6	Michael Gaston
Soul Survivor	7	Scott Roth
Misdirection	10	Scott Roth
To Touch	17	Marrienne Dandley
An Accident	18	Mike Richard
The Only Way To Start An Evening	19	John F. McHugh
A Wasted Man's Strings	21	Scott Roth
i	22	Scott Roth
The Stain	22	Marrienne Dandley
Pop	23	Myles E. Geer
Power	24	Rich Girouard
Poems	25	Jane L. Semien
Poem	25	Lynne Deeds
A Bright Sun-Shiny Day	26	John Zygilewicz
Recipe	28	Lynne Deeds
May Water	29	Richard Girouard
Listen!	30	Michael Gaston
Jacob	31	Michael L. Masaitis
A Night With Googly Goo	32	Myles Geer
We	33	Lynne Deeds
Death of A Quiet Revolutionary	34	John Zygilewicz
Deaf Mutes	43	Paula Pitkiewicz
The Dawn	46	Scott Roth
In The Middle Of The County	49	Paula Pitkiewicz
Earth Mother (An Epic Ballad)	50	Lynne Deeds
Dream	53	Scott Roth
TAWG	54	Steven Aldrich
Questions	56	Mary DiNoia
Wintry Song	57	Scott Roth

Cover by Jim Philips

Special thanks for prize money to the Gardner College Club and American Legion Post 72, Orange, Mass.

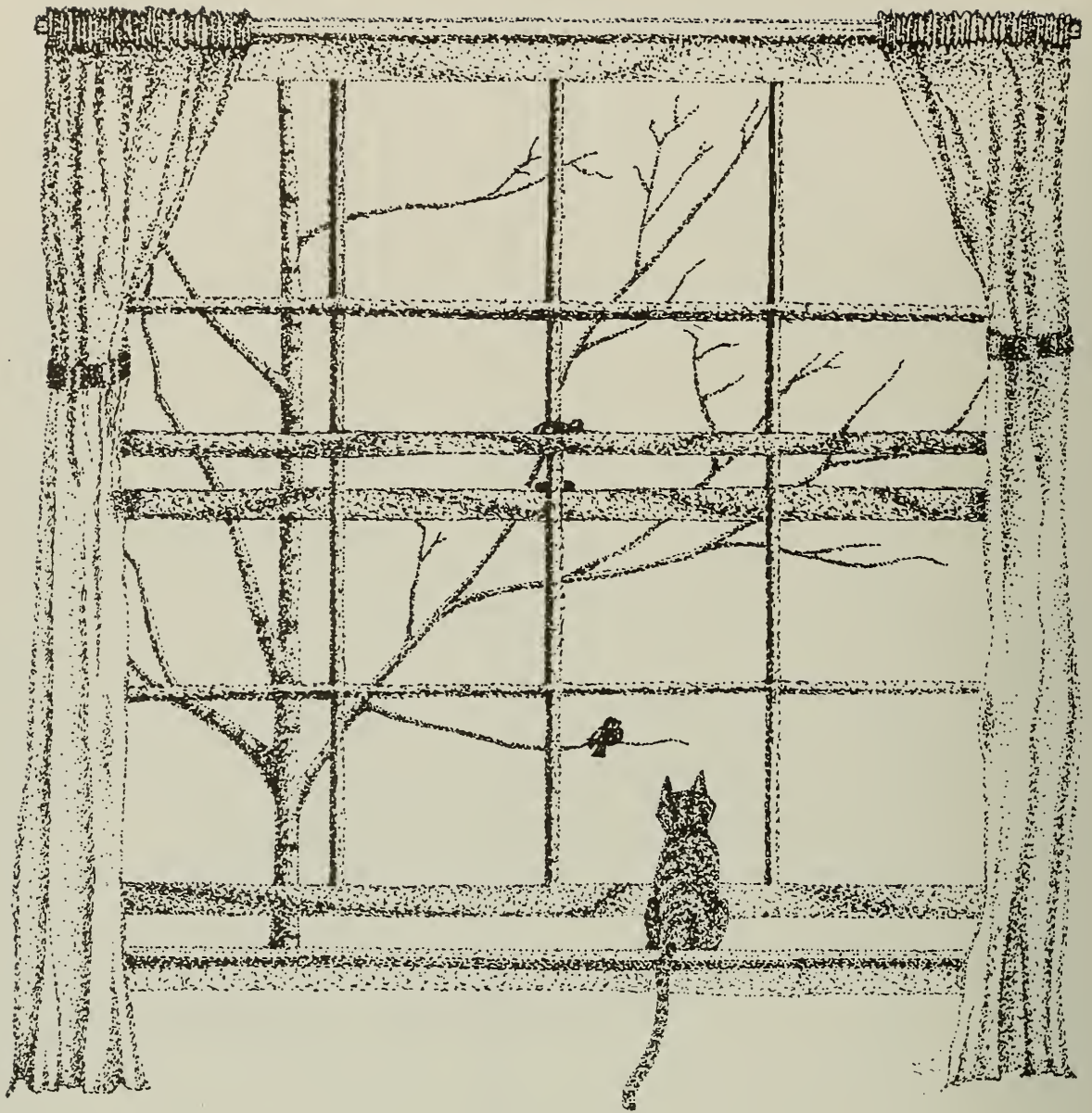
i, Vol. VI, Number 1, is published by the students of Mount Wachusett Community College, Gardner, Mass., 01440

Then said Evangelist, If this be thy condition, why standest thou still? He answered, Because I know not whither to go. Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "Fly from the wrath to come."

The man therefore read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder wicket-gate? The man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate; at which when thou knockest it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

From Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan





# The Jellyfish

Jim and Ann had left the party below and moved to a bedroom on the second floor. They lay there in silence on the unmade bed, each contemplating his separate world of existence. Jim laughed and thought out loud.

"If they only knew."

"If they only knew what?" said Ann inquisitively.

"Oh nothing, I was just thinking." But Jim knew exactly what had made him laugh. He was thinking of the guys downstairs. If they only knew what a waste he was making of the limited bedroom space they were occupying. Jim had known a number of females in his twenty-two years and it was always kind of a joke amongst the guys when a couple headed down the hall towards the stairway.

But there was something different about Ann. Something he couldn't control. She could play the game also, and was very good at it. There was something about her technique. Something different, something unique which left him wide open. However, the main problem was that Jim loved Ann, so he thought. But of all the females in the world, he couldn't understand why he had picked this one. Maybe he didn't love her. Was it merely the feeling of challenge, wanting something he had to struggle for which made him want her so?

But Jim knew her body. He knew it one night in a field with tall grass. He remembered how cool and fresh the air was. How white and smooth her skin with shadows dancing from the grass moving in the gentle breeze. There were other nights too, just as beautiful as this. But there was always something missing, for in every victory he experienced agonizing defeat. This game was being played for stakes far higher than those he was accustomed to. When Ann gave of her body, she also gave a glimpse of something far more beautiful, but later refused to acknowledge its existence.

Jim watched her in the soft light which filtered through the curtains from the street light outside. He watched the movement of her lips as she breathed--so moist and soft--their shape so delicate; he wouldn't have wanted them changed in any way. Then the lips began to speak. Jim knew the voice wouldn't fit the lips. It never did.

"Kiss me, Jim," Ann said. Her tone resembled children playing house. But Jim kissed her. He kissed her once and immediately knew that he was falling, falling again into the trap which he couldn't learn to avoid. She moved closer to him and he felt the outline of her body against his. It was so beautiful; he wanted to lay beside her forever. His mind wandered and he knew he was falling. He thought to himself and tried to analyze this creature beside him and the power she had over him.

You're near me now. It feels warm and soft. The outline of your hips so clear against mine. We could perform wonders together you and I. Your breath so cool against my neck. Your eyes wander about my form in expectation. Your heart bursting with love so long kept prisoner. The little sounds you make mean so much--the murmurs of love pass through your lips. A tremble down your spine. You're mine now, for a few seconds you're all mine. But you won't let it be. Oh you're so interested and thrilled--body and soul filled with flashes of what could be. Such delight is possible, you know it. Don't push it away, Ann; come sit and talk with me. Look at me, don't be afraid. The taste of love; anywhere I would know those lips, taste and form combined in one--so pure, so far away. I can feel you, love; oh you're so there! You're right, Ann, we both know where it's at. But please let's not go there yet. Please let's just lay here a while. I hardly know your kiss--don't leave. Your scent is so fresh, I know you are with me. Don't think about that, Ann--don't go; please, let out your love. Don't move the way you ought to move, just move. Don't think about me, just know I'm here--live every second. You know it's there; a hundred times you've felt the love inside you running through your body, touching softly every part with warmth and feeling. You can feel it now; I know you can. Let it grow; don't kill it. It's everything around you, Ann. It's me; it's the grass; it's the wind--the soft wind and you. Just think how lovely together. A breeze blowing gently across your hair, taking you to such a wonderful world. The earth knows you now; no longer a foreign body existing alone. Yes, everything is there along with you, you are no longer alone.

"What's the matter, Jim, did I do something wrong?" Ann had interrupted Jim's train of thought, but he didn't answer and returned to his private world. Please don't talk like that. Please, it's leaving! Don't make it leave. Why? You know it could be. Why do you torture our love? It's gone now--I can see you have locked it up far from my reach. You opened your hand for a moment; I saw something so beautiful. You watched my eyes--you came close and let me feel its presence. Then when I had seen enough you closed your hand and it was gone. You dirty bitch--does it please you so to watch my agony that your love can be pushed aside unnoticed? How many eyes have seen this but never known it? What type of a warped and cruel creature are you? You insult the very essence of your being. You hold it

high for me to see, to catch the scent; to know it's real--to run towards it as running never knew it could; for no one would dare play games on such sacred ground. But then you close your hand and watch. Such glee has never been experienced as that you know. That knowing smile that caught the first grader pissing in his pants at school. That laugh--such complete victory. You wretched wench. You should be flogged until the sewers of hell run red with your blood; a perpetual pole passed through you forever; an endless length of barbed wire ripped through your crotch until bits of flesh reach San Francisco Bay.

"What's the matter?" Ann said again.

"Shut up, I'm thinking."

Jim was furious, but Ann's voice had changed the mood of his thought.

But even now I feel your presence. You have sprung the trap and found your thrill. But now what is left Ann? Fear and guilt are close behind. You are clever though; their presence is little shown, and sometimes I wonder if you even have a conscience. But in your eyes, far away, I still see the love which burns within. Some day it shall return. Some day it will exist freely and not be used as a device. I have no right to wish agony upon you, for I have played the game and probably deserve as much as you. But some day, Ann, we will go there--together.

"What were you thinking about?" said Ann.

"Oh nothing."

"You weren't thinking about me, were you?"

"No, not you, Ann, someone else; someone you don't know. Someone very nice. Some day I'll tell you about her--some day--."

"Kiss me again, Jim; don't ever stop, Jim."

Jim kissed her hard on the mouth.

"Yes, it's so beautiful; you like kissing me, don't you, Jim. Tell me you do--oh yes, I know you do! You love me, don't you, Jim. Say you do, please say you do! I want you to say that so much."

"Yeah, sure, Ann, I know you love me to say it."

"Oh, you're so cute, Jim. You know I love being with you."

"So do I."

"Do it more, Jim. Kiss me again, please! Yes, oh Jim, that's lovely."

Jim moved away from her and sat on the edge of the bed. He knew if he were going to resist her it would have to be now. He contemplated trying to reach her but knew his attempts would be doomed to failure.

"Ann, I want to tell you something concerning us."

"Yes, o.k., don't you think we should go back downstairs. Let's go. Come on. What's the matter anyway? You know sometimes I wonder about you. Did I do something wrong? You wanted to do it didn't you?"

"Forget it."

"Oh, I know, you wanted to tell me something."

"I said, forget it!"

"O.k., you don't have to get mad! You know sometimes you're so damned unreasonable. For Christ's sake, you change moods like a kaleidoscope."

"Yeah, sure, Ann."

"Oh don't be mad, Jim, please! Kiss me again."

"You know sometimes I could kill you, Ann."

"Yes, wouldn't it be fun to die; I think about committing suicide sometimes, you know."

"I don't doubt it."

"You're so funny sometimes. You have a great sense of humor you know."

"So do you."

"Hey, Jim, you know what? We could commit suicide together. Wouldn't it be a gas?"

"Hilarious, let's go."

"Oh Jim, don't be such a grouch."

"I said let's go! Get your pretty little ass off the bed before I kick it off! The least I can do is get gassed tonight if you insist on playing games."

"What are you getting so mad about? You always ruin everything!"

"Look, Bitch, move! I have had enough!"

Robert M. Shattuck



# Hot Dog Rock

Anthony and I were pretty good friends. As a matter of fact, I considered him to be my very best friend. I also felt that Anthony was the type of person I myself would enjoy being like. Everyone said that Anthony and I had over-active imaginations, but I don't care. Anthony and I were in a world of our own.

Anthony was short; he had curly, curly, curly, thin, blonde hair. His eyes were so blue that I had to squint when I looked at him. He was the kind of guy the girls would say about, "Who, Anthony? I never really thought about him being cute, I don't know." The reason I liked him so much was because he was teaching me to use my imagination. Due to his expert teaching ability, I can now tell you that a leaf contains the memory of a tree, and if you eat it, you can acquire, with patience, the knowledge of that tree. Anthony could use his mind for this type of function better than anyone I ever knew.

I used to go to Black's beach in Maine with Anthony quite often to look for lobster floats or anything that could be scavenged. To get there, we first had to pass through the jungle along the treacherous trail that wound itself around the trees like a python sliding through the underbrush. The jungle was quite and dark and evil. It would trap those who wandered too much and impale them on its briars and thorns. Anthony and I passed through the jungle easily because we knew its tricks and traps.

In the middle of the jungle was the dirt road. Coming out of the jungle and stepping out onto the sunshine of the moss-covered dirt road was reassuring. It bolstered our confidence and gave us strength. On that stretch of road, the wind never seemed to jostle the leaves and the sun always seemed to be shining. Anthony and I could detect any form of movement or sound. A chipmunk flashed his striped brown and white back and disappeared with a rustle into the ground. A bird moved in a tree causing it to stir gently. We walked quietly and didn't talk. Our feet were clad with sneakers and they felt light and powerful as we glided across the mossy pads on the road.

Then the road descended into a tunnel of darkness and moisture and the moss disappeared to reveal the cool, wet rocks rounded by glaciers centuries ago. After a few seconds, we were out of the imposing tunnel and were again surrounded by the jungle. The jungle, unable to harm us on the safety of the road, had deposited a little of its extra water supply on the road to form a quagmire of mud. That jungle was tricky, all right; but we knew better than to just slop through the mud. Anthony and I were smart. We knew that the mud was of the sucking and holding variety and that it would refuse to release its hold on any unfortunate foot that inadvertently placed itself within its grasp, so we developed our instincts to sense which patches of mud were going to provide the least hindrance to our progress. We carefully selected our path and quickly walked across the mud. There is a special way to walk on mud. Anthony and I spread all of our weight evenly on our feet. We don't land on our heels or our toes because this would cause us to sink. We know better than to let that old jungle trick us.

After beating this, the jungle's last effort to trap us, we found ourselves within sensing distance of Black Beach, with nothing between us but benign woods. The cool sea breeze, filtered by a hundred yards of warm woods, carried the sound of the waves rolling in gently onto a beach composed of pebbles and sand.

We raced to the beach and I won because Anthony wasn't very athletic. I was first to see what treasures the ocean had tossed up onto the beach. I stood there looking down at the beach and breathed the sea. The air was never the same. It was cool and salty one second and then as it reversed direction, it became warm and earthy. Each little change in direction brought out a new scent or aroma that could be followed to its source.

Then, all of a sudden, I saw it! There was nothing really unusual about it, I just seemed drawn to it. All that I could see of it was just plain grey rock. What drew me to it was its regularity. I scrambled down the beach and as I did, I felt Anthony's presence behind me. I don't think he even saw it; he sensed the excitement of discovery in my movements and he wanted to be in on the discovery in some way. I reached it first and snatched it up. Anthony didn't have a chance, and besides he didn't even know what to look for. Who would be able to spot a grey rock among thousands of rocks while running? I found it and I had it. Envy flashed from Anthony's brilliantly blue eyes. I had a rock six inches long, three-quarters of an inch in diameter, grey, not very heavy, and it was perfectly formed. What it was or could have been was a petrified hot dog. It was by far my most exciting discovery. I had found something I could fantasize with. In fact, I would fantasize even better than my teacher, Anthony.

I examined the rock closely. It was smooth and rough at the same time. It seemed to be made out of some kind of sedimentary rock. Was it really a rock, or was it some special device left by spacemen to show where they had been? Was it man-made, or was it a freak of nature, a perfectly balanced hot dog rock? Would something happen if I held it a certain way? Would a cavern full of treasures be revealed to me if I inserted the hot dog rock into the proper hole? My mind

raced as I conjured up wilder and more extravagant ideas than even Anthony had experienced. My hot dog rock became my only interest.

The hot dog rock wasn't shiny or polished and it wouldn't write. It was firm and unflawed. It chimed musically when I tapped it, and it rolled beautifully and without hesitation. My imagination and perception had never been so heightened. My rock became my magic rock, my dream rock, my power rock. I felt invincible as I controlled the raging flood of ideas that my brain was creating.

My awareness from that point on had become more acute. I no longer had to follow in Anthony's footsteps, I could lead myself through my own mind. The hot dog rock was the inspiration.

|

Richard Girouard

## **We Are All Babes**

We are all babes  
Alone unto ourselves  
Sometimes in the grass  
Sometimes in the wood  
Sometimes nowhere at all  
And I can tell to you  
Of the grass and of the wood  
For I have been to all these places before  
At least one time before today.

Mel Poirier

# Beginnings

Long legs. That's what I like best about me. Long legs and tall body. I get tired of looking down on everyone. Being tall, dark and handsome is hard to maintain, especially being one of the weaker sex.

Anyway, I suppose I should start with the fact that three days ago I heard we had just passed the four billion mark in world population. This would ordinarily be a bit of information that would not have shaken me up, except that in the same breath the newscaster said, "However, the planet Earth is only capable of sustaining an equitable level of life for three billion people." He even sounded cheerful. Gleeful would be more like it. "See, ha-ha, we told you so. We're all gonna die."

Even these little bits of caustic sadism usually don't faze me; the doom mongers are all over the place. It happened later, while driving down the gleaming streets, sun roof top, diamond in the back, TV antenna, and so on. It was sudden, as though the shiny day had instantly shifted into clearer focus. It was hard to pinpoint. Maybe it was an unsettled gust of wind, or a sudden fluctuation of invisible motes and ionic radiation. Maybe it was a different lift to a bird's song, very slight, but on the edge of consciousness. Maybe it was all these things happening at once, causing a ripple in the sun shined streets.

I felt the hair rise on the back of my neck.

Just a small feeling a prickle, but all my senses snapped to attention at the silent rumble. The earth had shifted two degrees to the left.

There was a sudden realization that the world is going to die. I thought of all the civilizations of earth's past. I thought of Jesus and Moses, of Rome, Greece, England; of Hitler and Satan and God.

I actually felt kind of glad to be alive for it. To see that culmination and actual fall of civilization as we know it. What a time to be alive! Aside from being around for the Creation, what even in this planet's history has been as exquisitely dramatic as "The End?" The pyramids are pimples in comparison. I wonder if the networks will cover it.

How shall the end of humanity or the planet come about? Perhaps the Anti-Christ shall arise and bring us the return of Jesus and the Holocaust. Or, we could blow ourselves up, or pollute ourselves into oblivion, or all die of starvation. How about cancer epidemics, or bombardment with dangerous rays because of stampeding aerosol cans? What a story to tell your kids!

"Mommy, Mommy, tell us the one about the end of the world!"

"Well, when I was young--it was in 2035, I think; a small country in Africa set off a nuclear warhead. It went off course, having been directed to explode harmlessly over the ocean and was picked up by the United States' tracking systems. We missed, anti-missiled, anti, anti, and anti-missiled ourselves and three quarters of the Earth off the map."

"Tell us about the big boom it made."

"The boom was so big that all the glass in all the buildings and houses was pulverized into dust and then liquified by the searing heat. Good thing your father and I had built our own bomb shelter. We were one of the lucky ones. Ever since the sixties, when certain liberals were in office, they stopped making bomb shelters in public places because 'it was too expensive,' and 'besides, we'll never have that kind of war. What kind of fools do you think we are anyway?' Before that time there were enough shelters in every city for every man, woman, and child. The old word we used for those kinds of evil was "politics." Thank God we don't have that anymore.

Then the children go to bed, and visions of seared corpses and rotting flesh visit me again, and I think of all the dead relatives, dead friends, dead animals, dead everything. My eyes fill with tears thinking about how just yesterday one of the children asked me, "Mommy, what does the sun look like?"

I worry about my youngest. She is pale and sickly and has lost all her hair. She is growing extra fingers on her left hand. I think about genetics and radiation.

Anyway, survival is of no consequence. One cannot say how long one lives, only how well.

The feeling hasn't left. It's like the horrifying pleasure of fast driving or sky diving, only the kiss of death is irreversible.

I think of my own youthfulness. I think about my fine, strong legs and ungodly height. I would hate to see my legs get blown up. But what can I say? I can only hope for the best and live for the most. Perhaps, rather than an ending it will be a purging. A cleansing rebirth, through which man will rise phoenix-like from his own ashes to fulfill his promise of greatness. Genetic mutations to a finer physical being, moral mutations to an attainment of grace. From the shattered remains of our old evils, new goodness can be salvaged and nurtured, and man will gently walk into the glory that is his birthright.

If I live to see it, I'll probably miss listening to the radio. But in the end there was God.

Lynne Deeds



# Eagle

The bird so stately perched  
surveyed the mesas and plateaus.  
Jaw set against the granite.  
Claws dug into history.  
Waiting.  
Below he sees the Indian riding,  
Head lowered, weary from  
centuries of travel,  
Face weathered from the storm,  
Tired.  
From the valley the red man  
looks up to the eagle.  
Eyes meeting.  
Not searching for the answer  
already known,  
Understanding.

Michael Gaston

# Sillie

Sillie's when you feel  
Your gauge is stuck on giggle;  
Tickled to be alive  
Until you writhe and wriggle;  
Sillie's how you are,  
No way to be comprehended;  
You can do no harm  
Impossible to be offended;  
Sillie's how I am  
When I'm not serious,  
Insane and disarmed  
To the point of delirious;  
Sillie is this verse  
'Cause I'm not really tryin'  
To be overly profound  
Without havin' it come out lyin'.

Michael Gaston



# Soul Survivor

The afternoon sun, brilliant in its shipless sea of cool blue, cast long lurid shadows on the decayed colours of late fall. The air was crisp, slight, and wispy; it hung in its shapeless void like a thin, feeble veil--like the gossamer of spider webs entangling me into their clinging, unimpassioned strands. Now and then an unwelcomed winter wind would spring, seemingly from out of nowhere--everywhere. It coursed through the small forest of oaks like a swarm of agitated bees raging blindly at some impalpable figure in the distance; it caused little piles of drab, spiritless leaves to dance like puppets on a string. They swirled and rose to almost unbelievable heights, then fell, then rose again--faster and faster, higher and higher--like the fall and rise of notes on a sheet of music--simple, inharmonious notes. The discord increased as they fought among themselves, contending, not because of volition or will, but because they were helpless in the face of the phantom wind. Battered and spent by the violent forces that tore their ribs and ripped their thin, tenuous membranes, they settled quietly to the earth, blanketing body upon body--drab, helpless bodies, sucked of colour, drying under the muted rays of the cold, dusty sun.

I stopped for a moment and buttoned the top button of my red flannel jacket. My small ears were raw and chapped from the chilly November gales, and a stream of thin, slimy mucus trickled down from my burning nose; I wiped it on my coat-sleeve with one quick swoop of the arm.

It was a Sunday afternoon; I was on my way to the school playground to meet a friend of mine--Billie Walthan. Billie was older than me and stronger; he was thirteen and I was twelve. But, even so, we were the best of friends. The very best of friends, I thought, because he knew so much more than me.

I continued walking, noticing the old gnarled oaks that grew randomly on either side of the winding path. It almost seemed that I was in the middle of some great, dark forest that was filled with the usual nightmares and monsters of the unknown. They never scared me though; in fact, I was disappointed that I had never run into any. In all the years that I had traveled that worn, twisted path through the woods, to and from the elementary school, not once did I see anything more menacing than an occasional dog or squirrel.

A sudden wind buffeted my slight, frail body, throwing me off balance for a few, brief moments. I felt like a tightrope walker teetering precariously on a thin strand of steel that stretched endlessly between two gigantic towers. I could almost see the crowds below, screaming with anticipation, waiting to see blood, and, yet, hoping to see me safely across to the other side. It suddenly occurred to me that I had miles to go in a strong wind. Then, the gale quickly subsided; I stopped and tilted my frozen head skywards. I stood in awe watching one single leaf fall lazily to the ground in that moment of intense, dramatic calm. It was the only one, and it was different.

The leaf fell slowly in long sweeping spirals, soaring on invisible currents in an ocean of cool, waveless blue. It descended closer and closer, yet, further and further away as I tried to estimate the exact location of its momentous landing. I reached for it, outstretching my slight, childish arms as if trying to catch rainbows or gold from heaven. From what I saw, as I craned my reddened neck skyward, it was beautiful--a dab of colour in a world of decayed conformities. It was a single elm leaf in a world of oaks. I had to have it I thought...I had to.

It didn't land where I had expected it to; it fell, seemingly, miles away, and I had to run among the trees to catch it as the wind, now rejuvenated, attempted to sweep it out of my reach forever. The vital dab of colour scudded just ahead of me--then it was stopped. I smiled slyly and laughed to myself as I realized that it would never escape by running away; there were too many obstacles; it was trapped, tangled and pinched between the exposed roots of an old, half-fallen oak tree. Bending over, I snatched the helpless, fragile leaf into my eager hands. I stared at it for a long, fascinating moment. The colours were glorious; burnished reds flowed subtly into outer edges of yellow ambers and it was tinged with green, a quiet reminder of a previous youth. I turned it over in my ungloved hands a few times, thinking to myself how funny it was to find a single elm leaf in a woods where the only trees were oak. It must have been a traveler, I thought, and it was good; I never faulted a windfall.

Carefully, trying not to bend or mutilate my precious leaf, I slipped it into the front pocket of my jeans; then walked diligently and purposefully back to the path and eventually to the school playground.

Coming out of the forest was like coming to the end of a long, shadowy corridor; leafy darkness transcended to a cold, dusty brilliance that seemed to waiver like a quiet yellow flame in a gentle breeze. A vast wasteland lay stretched out before me like a desert, a cold, windy desert that was strewn with the rusty reminders of youth. I heard a merry-go-round squeaking, revolving slowly as if being pushed by some invisible spirit seeking to capture lost joys and forgotten dreams. It would never find them going around in circles though, I thought.

A great brick citadel, that distinguished church of learning, also lay before me. They called it "East Newhall Elementary." It was shaped like a squared horseshoe bricked in red, windows like a thousand mud puddles reflecting the arid images of thirsty wanderers. In the center of the great shoe, surrounded on three sides, walled in, was my desert playground; it was my home away from home, a world of fantasy that I alone dreamed and directed.

I walked closer, noticing rusted swings swaying in the almost constant wind--a shifting constant. The dark, obscure steps became clearer as I approached; I noticed a grey, lone figure sitting on the lowest one. It was Billie.

He was wearing his father's old, battered army coat and a dark, woolen cap which came down to his eyebrows, just above his dull, lifeless, brown eyes. He had on his brown corduroy pants, the ones he wore so often; they had small rips in the knees. His shoes were what fascinated me though; they were his prized possessions, steeled-toed work boots that bound the foot in layers of heavy leather and lace. He was proud of them because his father had a pair just like them. I wore sneakers.

As I neared the awesome, chalky-white steps, he finally noticed me approaching. He spoke, his voice dry and monotonous.

"Ya finally got here..what took ya?"

"I stopped in the forest for a few minutes," I replied overly enthusiastic, trying to offset the somber, almost listless, atmosphere of the meeting.

Billie hesitated for a few moments, mulling over what I had just said. He spoke slowly. "Wha' forest...? Oh! Oh, you must mean the trees behind Broomer's fence," he said, as it suddenly dawned on him like a wave building in strength and momentum, then suddenly crashing down on the smooth, pebbled beaches of his mind. He was like that--no imagination, no dreams to carry him through.

"Yeah, that's what I mean," I agreed as I sat down next to him on the frigid, cement steps. We sat in silence for a few moments.

"My dad says he's gonna take me huntin' with him next year," he suddenly vociferated. "He says huntin' is a man's sport."

I cringed at the thought; I could never be a man. "What do ya wanna do, Billie?" I said, almost wishing that I hadn't. He brightened up a little as an idea seemed to pierce the hoary darkness of his mind. He smiled slyly, but his large, brown eyes remained dull and listless.

"They just put new windows in the first grade rooms...the putty's still fresh," he said simply.

"So what?"

"So, let's dig some of it out and make shapes with it; it makes a great clay." He quickly jumped to his feet and started running towards the east wing of the school. Halfway there, he stopped dead in his tracks to wave me on. Reluctantly, I struggled to my feet and trotted after him.

The few hundred yards between Billie and me seemed like a vast, infinite expanse that stretched on endlessly like a cold stormy ocean. Breaking this singular confluency were the various playground paraphernalia protruding like sore, metallic thumbs in the great, sandy sea of illusion. I began to run. Monkey bars, merry-go-rounds, and seesaws sped by; today was not their day, I thought.

After a few breathless moments, I finally reached the new, shimmering windows that were recently put in. Billie was already there, poking his eager fingers into the cracks between the gray masonite ledge and the window frame. He pulled up a big glob of the soft, gray putty, squishing it between his pale, whitened fingers.

"See, it's neat stuff," he exclaimed, working the dull substance harder and harder as if trying to squeeze the non-existent lift from it. "Why don't you get some?"

"I-I don't like to shape things," I replied uneasily, trying not to appear too silly.

He looked at me strangely, with a stupid smirk on his pale face. "You're strange," he said simply. "It's fun to shape things. When you let them dry in the sun, they turn hard and you've got 'em forever."

"Yeah...forever," I said.

A wind swept across the arid playground, kicking sand in our eyes. Billie turned and gazed out across the expanse between the two wings of the building. He spied the rusty swing set in the center of the courtyard. "Let's play on the swings!" he vociferated, dropping the little ball of putty to the ground. The sand seemed to swarm all over it as it touched the semi-frozen earth.

"Sure," I said, trying hard to think of a plausible excuse for going home--none came to mind. Billie quickly galloped off to the distant swings; he looked like an old plow horse plodding towards greener pastures. I walked slowly, thinking about things; I always thought too much. It occurred to me that I wasn't like Billie; I was different.

As I began walking towards the swings, towards my fate perhaps, a sudden panic seized me for a few brief moments as I remembered my little, coloured leaf that I had held so dearly coiffed between two layers of riveted cloth. I felt inside the front pocket of my jeans,



relieved when I touched its warm suppleness; it was still there, I thought. Then, for some unexplainable reason, because of some eerie feeling, I wheeled around suddenly like the world on its axis. I looked into the windows of the school, catching an almost imperceptible movement from the inside. It had frightened me, causing me to run to the swings and Billie.

I was almost all the way there, when suddenly something else caught my attention. It was a small incident, something that most people would have missed or ignored: two small pincher bugs, their carapaces shiny black in the dusty afternoon sun, battled--in the wind--over a small crumb of bread on top of a small, grey rock. I crouched down in fascination, watching ringside the ancient struggle; it was the true art of pugnacious concern--survival. The fight was pretty even; dismembered limbs lay all around still raging against the night with fierce, mindless kicks and thrusts. The two bugs were married to each other in mortal, bloody combat. I listened carefully, trying to discern any war cries or battle screams as they fought; the only sounds were those of Billie's swing creaking like an old, rusted pendulum--back and forth, back and forth--eventually even that stopped.

I was now totally engrossed in my role as observer and judge, they... Suddenly the heavy fall of boots came into my dream, into my little realm of reality; it was Billie--my friend Billie.

"What's goin' on?" he retored, looking like some big, insensitive brute. He crouched down alongside of me.

"It's a fight," I said simple. He didn't reply, only stared and stared at the gruesome scene taking place at our feet. A spark seemed to kindle in his otherwise dull, brown eyes; they grew brilliant, hopeful and dreamy like two large, glowing saucers. I shared in his excitement. But, then, without so much as an iota of warning, the brilliance in his eyes quickly faded; it was like a candle being blown out by some weary night dreamer in the middle of the day, a cold, weary day. The wind must have done it, I thought.

He quickly stood up, speaking again in his monotone. "They're just bugs," he said as he lifted his heavy, steel-toed boot, bringing the matter to an unexpected end with one swift, downward step. Greenish gore and entrails, however small, lay splattered on the rock; they had both lost.

An incomprehensible fury rose within me; I stood up stammering. "Y-you killed them! They're dead!" Hot, burning tears streamed down my frozen face. Raging blindly I struck out at him, trying to hurt and kill...

He merely forced me to the ground with one effortless shove. "It's only some lousy bugs," he muttered as he slowly walked away, his killer foot dragging in the sand as if to wipe any remaining gore from his cold, invincible boot.

I laid on the half-frozen ground for a few moments, gathering my twisted thoughts, sobbing quietly to myself. My heart pounded like a large bass drum within the confines of imprisoned thoughts suddenly freed; I would not be beaten, I thought...no.

Then he came--unexpectedly--like some phantom of the night. From where I lay, all I could see were a pair of heavy, dull work shoes, worn by the many troubled years of toil. I wasn't frightened anymore; I stood up, brushing the dirt from my jeans. He towered above me like some fantastic giant, then I recognized who it was--the janitor of my school.

"Were you fightin'?" he asked slowly, almost dimwittedly.

"No," I replied solemnly.

"Oh." He remained silent for a few moments, then..."Did you take putty from the windows? I thought I saw you."

"No...it wasn't me."

He looked thoughtful for a few moments, then spoke. "Empty your pockets for me."

I obeyed without hesitation, expositing the white inner liners of all my jean pockets except for the front one.

"How 'bout that one?" he said.

Slowly, ever so slowly, I pulled up the liner of the front pocket. The leaf, that vital dab of colour, tumbled to the frozen earth; it seemed to shiver in the cold. I bent down and picked it up.

"What's that?" he said.

"Only a leaf," I replied, outstretching my hands to show him.

"Yeah, it's a nice one," he said as though for a moment. "You know what you could do?" He put his long, crooked finger to his cracked, pale lips. "You could iron that between two pieces of wax paper, that way you could keep the colours forever."

"No," I said simply.

A gale picked up, grabbed the frail, shaking leaf from my open palm and sent it flying into the wind. It rose almost unbelievably fast, then eventually vanished from sight into the swirling brilliance of a cold, dusty sun.

# Misdirection

(A play in one act)

## CHARACTERS

Lee Fletcher, the insane man  
The Voice from behind the mirror, a mystery  
An Orderly, as himself  
A Psychiatrist, he that lives a lie  
The Wife, a sanely derived matron

All the action takes place in a drab, undecorated hospital room. The room is but one of the opposing realities; two cubicles, a thousand cubicles of fear. Row upon row, stack upon stack--they stipulate the actions of the multitudes. This particular room, this mortal room, is the prison of one man, the incarcerator of many. It asks no questions, gives no answers, because it is but the shell of indifference, the injector of limitations. The rooms are insane, for they know not what they do; their meanings are but the ambiguous statements of nothingness.

Scene: A small room, consisting of an old iron-framed bed, two plain wooden chairs, and a glossy-white bureau that supports a large, cracked mirror. Above the neatly made-up bed is a small, dirty window, which is covered with a heavy iron grate. The bureau abuts a wall (stage left), the chairs are located in front and to the right of the bureau. The lighting is subtle, producing a dreamy effect that underscores the supposed realities of the room. The stage is thus set--the journey begins.

Scene 1: Two men in white coats burst through the door (back center stage); between the two of them, they carry Lee Fletcher, who is struggling weakly in their strong, forceful grip. No words are spoken as the two men throw Lee onto the bed (front stage right); the bedsprings squeak protestingly from the weight of his slight body. The men leave as quickly as they came; the lights dim, plunging the stage into total darkness. A single spotlight illuminates Lee's face; gradually the spot of light grows larger and larger until the room is once again lit. We see Lee staring at the ceiling, his head on the pillow, his arms folded above his head. He speaks out loud to himself.

Lee (in a soft even voice): I am of the sun, for my eyes speak the truth of its brilliance. They cannot understand...only I...only I can see the error of their ways. (He pauses) Such truth from a madman? Oh, if only...if only...I cannot give way to their sanity; I am the genius of insanity..for what else can I be? (A rapping is heard. A voice speaks, seemingly emanating from the bureau mirror).

Voice (far away and muffled): Life is but a rap on the wall. It comes and goes, louder and softer.

Lee (not surprised, getting out of bed and walking towards the bureau): Can it be not the ravings of a madman?

Voice: The knock is only more forceful.

(Lee slowly sits down in the chair that stands in front of the mirror and stares at his own reflection. There is a knock at the door. An orderly lets himself in with a tray of food.)

Orderly: (Closing the door): Let's see now--and you ar-r-re (looking at a slip of paper on the tray) Lee Fletcher. How are you this evening? I brought you some yummy, yummy food to go in your tum-tum. (He sets the tray in front of Lee, on top of the bureau.)

Lee (somewhat irritated): I don't want your yummys in my tumay, for I would probably puke my wretched guts. More than likely I'd puke them all over you...you with that sly, childish face, a face of evil discontent; one that I despise.



Orderly: (nonchalantly) Well now, aren't we in a good mood tonight? Hopefully you'll find it in yourself to be a little kinder when the doctor gets here. (He sits down in the chair to the right of the bureau.) Now eat.

Lee (still staring in the mirror): It's only the ravings of a madman. (Pauses) This wonderful slop should go very well, very well indeed.

Orderly (quickly getting up): Goddamn you, you crazy bastard! I hope you starve!

Lee: Now that's food for thought. But it is said that the world cannot be served on a silver platter. (The orderly stoops to pick up the tray. Lee laughs quietly.) Ha-ah! A slave to a madman! Isn't it funny how we make the decisions. Oh, how we rule.

Orderly: Yeah, you rule all right--you rule the darkness of your mind.

Lee (Introspectively): Interesting. But it's a mind more enlightened, more...

(He stops abruptly, turns to face the orderly and puts a finger to his mouth.) Sh-h-h! Quiet! Do you hear a voice?

Orderly (sarcastically): Yeah, I hear a voice. I hear the voice of your demise.

(He gets up, opens the door and walks out.)

Lee (urgently): Wait! Come back! (The orderly closes the door.)  
Oh...well then, go slave.

(The Voice speaks again.)

Voice: Good! He is gone. Now in the top bureau drawer...

Lee (quickly, looking back into the mirror): Not yet! But do you think I was "forceful" enough?

Voice: It was good, but I did not hear it, for I am here and you are there.

Lee: It is true, we are all apart...all alone in this mortal world of indifference. There can be no salvation, merely pain, merely suffering and hate.

Voice: No! You are wrong, we "can" overcome. It's all a matter of levels, a matter of transportation.

Lee: Then which bus do I take, which vehicle of escape?

Voice (quietly): You take the bus of silence, the one that travels in my direction.

Lee (also quietly): At the corner of Stix and Jordan?

Voice: The very same.

Lee (perplexed): Oh...oh, can it be but so?

Voice (gravely): But so@ (Pauses) In the top drawer...

(The door once again opens. A psychiatrist with horn-rimmed glasses and a white medical smock walks in, closing the door behind him.)

Psychiatrist (looking at the notebook he carries in his arm): Let's see now...and you are? Ah, here it is--Fletcher, Lee Fletcher. (Lee glances at the psychiatrist, then brings his attention back to the mirror.) How do you feel today Mr. Fletcher?

Lee (in monotone): Like a madman...like a genius.

Psychiatrist: Interesting that you should say that, maybe you'd like to elaborate on that point a little more. (He sits in the chair to the right of the bureau, concentrating all his attention on Lee.)

Lee: A madman needs no corroborating evidence, his genius is but a percept of thought.

Psychiatrist (Puzzled): Quite true...quite true. Let me ask you one question though, do you know why you are here?

Lee (facing the psychiatrist): Sure! I am here because...because--I am of the sun, because I have seen the truth. I mend the follies of my way.

Psychiatrist (looking at his notebook): It says here that you tried stuffing credit cards and bills down your wife's throat. You ripped apart your office at the accounting firm, you ranted and raved at your fellow workers, you even smashed down the door to the executive washroom when your boss was in there. And these are just a few of many, many similar incidents. (He pauses) What do you have to say now?

Lee (laughing): Ha, ha! I'd do it all over again if I had the chance.

Psychiatrist (wonderingly) But why? What motivates you to do these things?

Lee (thinking, then quietly): She, he, they, and it: My wife, cheating on me, buying up the town with her damned credit cards. She'll see though, she'll see. I have enough information--more than enough. But who listens to a madman? I am safe from their evil doings.

Psychiatrist: You said "they" and "it." Who are they?

Lee (They are those who wish me destroyed. Those great computer minds that click out their boring humdrum existences. Those who dig and scratch to get to the top of nothingness. My fellow workers; oh, how they tried to stab me in the back with their stubby little daggers. How they played the game. (pauses) I didn't want to play by their rules anymore; I wanted to play by mine. I showed them....

Psychiatrist: And what about "it?"

Lee (looking into the mirror): It talks to me.

Psychiatrist: What does?

Lee: The voice, it...it calls to me.

Psychiatrist: When did you first hear this voice?

Lee: A month ago. It called to me, as...as if in the next room. It tells me what to do, it's my other self. We are separated.

Psychiatrist (writing in his notebook): And do you hear it in this room?

Lee: Yes, it comes from behind the mirror.

Psychiatrist: (in a subdued tone): Right from the mirror, huh? Interesting. (Writing in his notebook.) What does it talk to you about?

Lee (looking at the psychiatrist): It talks to me about levels, about separation, about togetherness. (Pauses) It wants me to join...

Psychiatrist: How does it propose to do this--this joining?

Lee (simply): It wants me to take a bus.

Psychiatrist (laughing under his breath): Ha-a-ah. Interesting.

(Muttering under his breath, writing in his notebook). Classic, simple classic.

Lee: Classically mad, eh doctor?

Psychiatrist (looking up at Lee): What...? Oh...yes, right, quite right. (Looks at his watch.)

(The orderly knocks on the door, opens it wide enough to get his head in. He scowls at Lee. The psychiatrist turns around.)

Psychiatrist: Yes, what is it?

Orderly (in a sly voice): Your nurse is waiting in your office for her--therapy. (He winks.)

Psychiatrist: Oh...all right. I'll be right there. (Talking to Lee.)

(I'll be seeing you later, I have some-ah-important business to attend to. (He gets up from the chair, walks to the door, opens it and exits.)

Lee (looking at the door, urgently): Wait! Come back@ (The door closes) Oh...well, slaves must have their fun too...I guess. (Lee gets up and walks to the edge of the bed; he looks out the small, dirty window, grasping the iron grate.) It's so dirty, (shakes the grate), but I am protected...yes, protected...

Voice: (muffled and far away) Yes, protected.

(Lee runs over to his chair and sits down, looking in the mirror.)

Lee: I hear you, I hear you.

Voice: I hear you, but not well my friend, not well enough. Come closer.

Lee (perplexed): But how...why? Can you not come to me?

Voice: It is not a question of I coming to you, for it can only work one way...my way. So come, come now for your own salvation. Remember, the world is mad, you are but the sane and sound.

Lee: A genius is mad, for there is but one.

Voice: True! So he must come also.

Lee: Let me think, let me...

(There is a sudden knock at the door, a woman's voice speaks from the other side.)

The Wife: Lee, it's me, your wife. Can I come in?

Lee (looking towards the door): Still talking to me from behind closed doors? Come in and be enlightened.

Wife: I brought over a few magazines just in case you wanted to read.

Lee (looking into the mirror): Now, other self, reveal your wisdom! (Silence)

Wife (sympathetically): Lee, please don't. I-I don't like to see you this way.

(Lee gets up, walks over to the bed and lays down, burying his head in the pillow. The bedsprings squeak protestingly under the weight of his body.)

Wife: (looking towards the bed) I still love you, Lee. (She walks over to the bureau.) And when this is all over, this-this nervous breakdown, I'm sure we'll be all right. (She opens the top bureau drawer and looks inside. She smiles as she quietly closes it.)

(Lee quickly sits up, his wife slides stealthily into the chair in front of the bureau.)



Lee (angry): Must you torture me night after night? (Yelling.) Doesn't even madness have respite from you? Am I not free?

Wife (In a calm voice): Don't yell. Just-just calm down. These walls are paper thin. Think of the other patients.

Lee (introspectively): I am...I am.

Wife (looking at Lee) Now why don't you crawl into bed?

Lee: I have not made this bed. I do not have to lie in it. (His eyes grow wide.) It's you, it has always been you...

Wife (looking away): No...it's not me. You ruined your own life. We all do.

Lee: You cannot fool my genius. I see through you as one would see through this dirty window. (He points to the window.) The truth is there all right, but it's clouded.

Wife: I don't know what you're talking about. The doctor is right--you are mentally disturbed. It's more than just a breakdown. I hate you for it, Lee, I always will.

Lee (laughing): Ha-a-ah! I love the way you hate me, because it's an ill-founded hate, one that earns my contempt.

Wife (angry): I'll have the last laugh, Lee! Wait and see.

Lee (sarcastically): You're a poet and you don't know it, you're a star-crossed lover that loves another, you're a childless mother who kills this other. (points to himself.)

Wife (yelling): I don't have to take this from you! You're a madman! I hate you for it!

Lee: Sh-h! Quiet! For the walls are paper thin.

Wife: You...

Lee: You what? Madman! I must be squashed like a bug on the floor.

(He grinds his heel on the floor.) He decides, (pointing upward), he destroys, just like he destroyed you. I am not a madman, my wife, I merely perceive the truth.

Wife (quietly): Do you? We'll just see...just see...

Lee (under his breath): I do and we will.

Wife: What?

Lee: Nothing, just the ravings of a madman.

Wife: Oh...well, I guess I should be going then. (She gets up from the chair and opens the door and leaves.)

Lee (as she closes the door): Go then slave. Do thine evil deeds.  
(Silence prevails, the lights dim...darkness.)

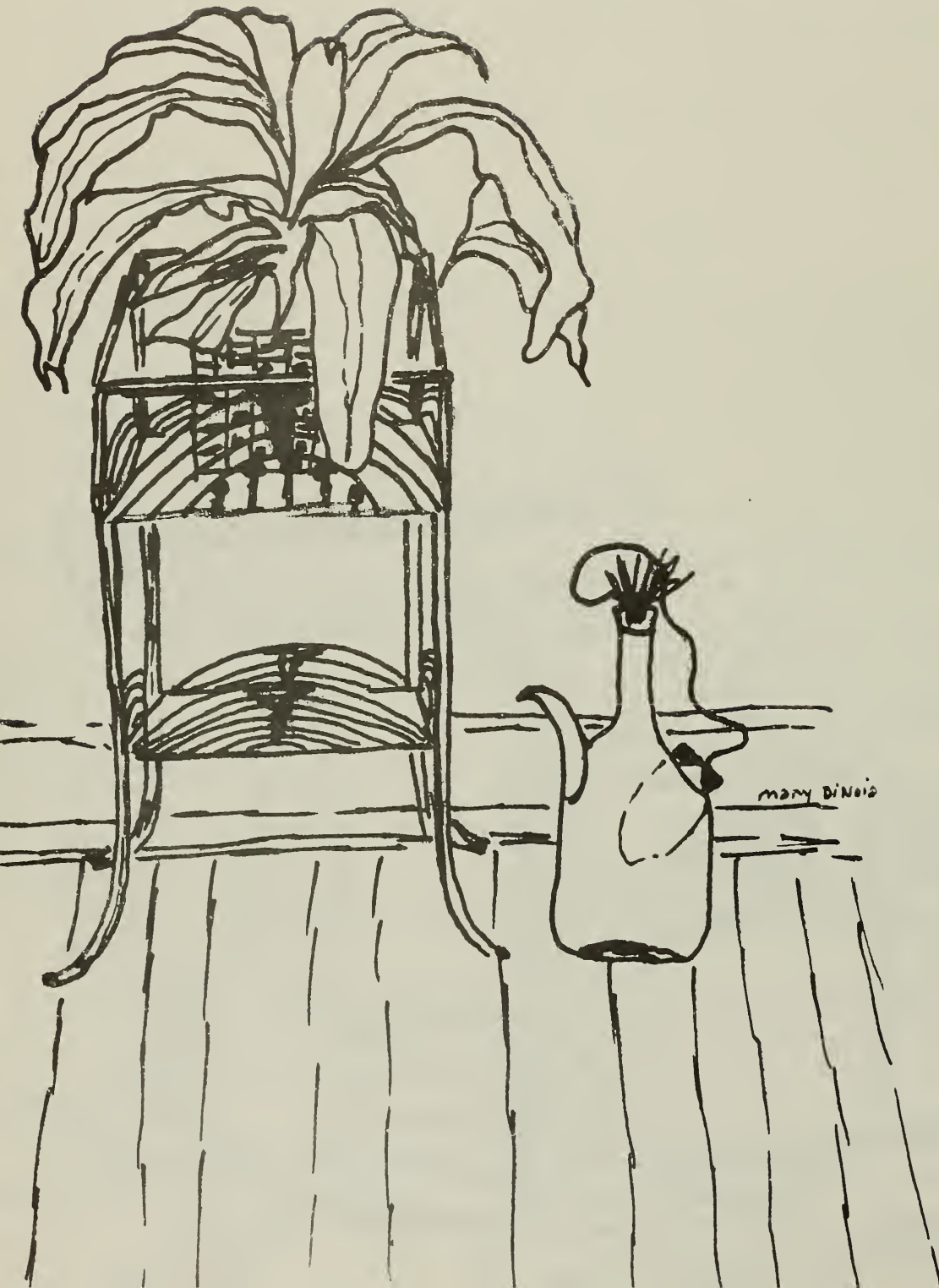
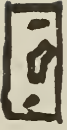
The lights gradually come back on; however, now the lighting is harsh, producing the effect of sharply defined shadows--long, mocking shadows. We find Lee Fletcher standing in the middle of the room, his shoulders are slumped, he stares at the ceiling with an expression of wonder on his face. He is alone. The Voice speaks once again...

Voice: Are you prepared for the journey? The bus leaves very soon.





giond  
hach



Lee (walking towards the mirror): I am prepared in a manner of speaking. My eyes have seen the truth, I have perceived you--you who speaks my name in a strange unreal tongue, the tongue of the dead. I can do nothing more than obey; for, I am a madman worthy of the sun.

Voice: So be it, and so it shall be done. The vehicle of your maddened escape can be found in the top bureau drawer...

Lee: (pointing to the bottom drawer): This one?

Voice: Yes.

Lee: Before I open this drawer, there are but a few mortal words I have left to say.

Voice: So be it.

Lee: (in a calm, sane voice) I have always feared. I have feared my haunting past, I have feared the future. For years I have walked the fine line of insanity. Now I am sane, I see the hopelessness, I fear no more--for fear is but a word and not a basis for retreat. I retreat no longer; I am free of my evil curse, free of those fear induced inhibitions that haunt us all. I can see the clarity of my soul, the transparency of a maddened society. I may be sane, but for those who are not I have pity, I have love. I shall never really leave, I shall not retreat into darkness. I will show you as I will show the rest of the world. (Pauses) Now lead me, lead me on to your world of death, for I will shun it when I am there. (Silence)

Voice: True words what you have said, but I cannot hear them. Come closer my friend, come closer to your destiny. Open the top bureau drawer.

Lee (gravely): I shall do as you ask. (Lee grabs the two silver handles on the top drawer and pulls it open. He stares into the drawer for a long moment.) So this be the vehicle of my demise. Give me strength, give me strength...

Voice: How can I give you that which you already have?

Lee: Then pray for me.

Voice: No...I wait for you.

(Lee reaches into the drawer, nervously pulls out a large black revolver. He gets up, walks to the center of the room dragging the chair with him. He climbs onto the chair, looks down into the mirror while holding the gun to his side.)

Lee: So this is it, my ticket to freedom.

Voice: It is.

Lee (quietly): How...?

Voice: Put the weapon to your temple, release the safety, slowly pull the trigger. There are but two bullets in the gun, two bullets of freedom.

(Lee looks at the gun for a long moment, feeling the weight, looking into the chambers of sleeping death. Slowly he raises the revolver to his head. As he squeezes the trigger, the lights dim, an audible click echoes throughout the darkness of the room. The lights come back on again.)

Lee: Again?

Voice: Again. (Silence)

(Lee once again squeezes the trigger, the room grows dark, another click echoes in the room. The lights come back on. A trickle of sweat is seen running down Lee's face.)

Lee: I shall come now...

(The room grows dark and silent. The air is thick and the blackest of black. A gun fires, a fiery flash quickly overcomes the darkness for one brief instant. Silence follows.)

Voice: (breaking the silence in the darkness) Of course, you go alone...and arrive alone. I am not there, I never was, just as you were never mad, merely--misdirected. (A chair in the next room scuffs the floor, footsteps are heard, bedsprings squeak again, footsteps, a chair scuffs the floor. The voice listens...)

Voice: Fletcher?

(The lights in Lee's room come on. Lee is standing just in front of the mirror, holding the just fired gun in his right hand.)

Lee (calmly): I am here.

Voice: (nervously) B-but the shot...?

Lee: Yes--the shot. (Pauses) I did not fall, you were deceived my cracked and broken image. Now it is my turn... (Lee points the gun at the center of the mirror, where the voice came from. He pulls the trigger, the gun flashes as a bullet shatters the mirror, ripping through the wall. In the next room a mirror shatters, a body falls, a chair is tipped over--it bounces on the floor. Silence.)

Lee (speaking through smoke): You do not know my genius--for I am a madman. (Pauses) No my friend, you were--the misdirected.

CURTAIN

Scott E. Roth



# To Touch

I am so cold. The air surrounding me is so cold. I touch the door, the two tiny windows, and the four walls inclosing my icy being. They, too, are so cold. I crawl and sweep the entire floor with my hands. I feel the smooth vinyl and the glassy coat of reflection some poor geeser was paid to place on the floor. Strange, how does one place a reflection on a floor? Mommy, I want your womb; mommy I want your compassionate touch; Mommy I want your heart again.

I touch the dust, I touch the fairy light balls of hair, but I do not touch warmth. The bed, get in the bed! No, no! Yes, yes, baby go! But the white, the ugly white iron. We know iron is cold. The sheets, the sheets are white, and God, the sheets are cold. The corner by the door; I must reach the corner by the door.

The room is painted regulation white, but the paint has faded to an ugly elephant gray, and the regulations failed to allot sufficient funds to veil that ugliness. There are only two small windows in the room. They are situated exactly opposite each other, and are separated by fifteen feet of intangible atmosphere which contains the fluctuating emotions and madneses of each individual occupying it. The floor is of a pale green with specks of gray and black vainly attempting to escape the unholy graps of the dominating green. The bed stands solitary, and demanding, in the middle of the room. The shiny whiteness of the bars projects an unfeeling entity. No comfort is found there.

The eye is forever being drawn toward the omniscient sky, visible through one of the windows. Escape, hope, and sustenance are found in that tiny sector of a room that is, in all truth, the world. The two iron bars are unsuccessful in their endeavor to capture the sustenance. They did not believe in the powers of the sky, but the onlooker feels in every fiber of his body, and soul, that power, and the path cannot be hindered.

The other window is the invading peephole. This is the observatory of the specialists and the magical, healing witches. I am one of those magical witches, commonly referred to as a psychiatric nurse, and I stand invading a woman's private madness. I have studied this woman for two hours. That statement is false. I studied that woman for one hour, and the other hour was spent in a maze of shared longings. I, who pride myself in my complete objectivity, became entwined with the splattering emotions of a patient.

The woman was brought in by a fat, white policewoman. We were told she had no type of identification on her person, and that all police attempts to contact any friends or relatives emerged fruitless. Apparently she had wandered into a laundry mat crying softly, and begging for warmth. The manager, being unsuccessful in eliciting a response, other than her pleas for warmth, called the police. The police were unable to communicate with her, and that is how she came into my hands. A frightened, lonely woman is pivoted from one human organization to another as if she were a multi-colored top. The children have tired of their playing, and no longer wish to hear the whines. The top is placed in a vaguely remembered toy box and left for the long dead ghosts of the long dead children to fumble with. Occasionally the top is brought back to life, but too often the top lies forgotten and buried alive.

The woman is of a frail build. Her facial features are delicate and child-like. Her eyes are two piercing black almonds that question her existence in such a world. Her hair is cropped closely around her face and it is the color of her eyes. Her skin is a beautiful contrast to the dark eyes and dark hair. It is of a transparent creamy color, and one can see the mystical map of life on various parts of her body.

She has crept to the corner by the door, and I can no longer see her. Although I cannot see her I can still feel the quivering pain we both shared while she crawled to the corner. She did not verbally scream or softly cry out the inner agony. She did not need to. Her eyes verbalized her terror. Searching, searching, searching for that lost warmth.

I pick at the peeling paint surrounding the window. Someone calls my name. Something inside me acknowledges the call and replies with a shallow hello.

I am swathed in a sheer green dress that is billowing around my body. The wind is rough, but warm. The bright moon lights the water, the trees, the fallen pine needles, and the tears shimmering from his eyes. I hear him say goodbye, and once again, I don't believe he is speaking. I reach to touch my sustenance, and it moves from my grasp. God, no!

I am brought back to the present by a passing orderly, with a very concerned look and tone. He asks if I am alright. Yes, I reply. I chuckle to myself. Perhaps he thinks I have finally succumbed to the surrounding insanity. Perhaps I have.

The goodbye and my following objectivity. Building the walls, the windows, the white beds, and closing out warmth.

That woman's searching, and her terror. I once felt that same terror, that same foreign loneliness, but I was able to hide that loneliness from myself. This woman cannot hide that loneliness. She cannot hide it from herself because she is not blind. I was able to hid it because I was blind. She realized her warmth could not be found in this world and that is why she is here. But I, I am the fortunate one. My warmth can be found in this world. She made me see this.

I open the door and enter the room. The room is warm, almost too warm, and she is curled in a fetal ball in the corner. Her head rises and she smiles. I hold out my hand to her and she responds with a tight clutch. She seemed to be saying she understood my reasons for needing her touch. The tears are blinding my eyes and sobs are covering the silence. She moves and suddenly she is hugging me. I stop my weeping and glance into her eyes. I am greeted by two bright lights of happiness. I watch as the light fades to a vacant stare and I feel the tight arms go limp. She falls limp and it is my turn to hold her. There is a content smile on her lips, but her eyes remain vacant. I cannot get any response from her. I call an orderly and we place her on the bed.

She has found her warmth and I, I am finding mine.

Mommy came today; she had tears in her eyes. She was so happy to see me that she cried. I held her and as I was going to sleep she held me. I am so warm that I am going to sleep forever.

Marrianne Dandley

## An Accident

There was an accident here  
last night.

It was in the newspapers,  
on the radio,

On the faces of the crowds  
who flocked to gape

At the mangled bodies  
and

The shattered debris,  
As if there was something  
they could have done.

Mike Richard

# The Only Way To Start An Evening

The door flew open as a gust of frigid air exploded into the small hallway, sending an invisible ethereal whirlpool throughout the lifeless crowd. Two men dressed almost identically in leather jackets and open neck shirts entered as the wind slammed the door shut behind them with a sharp crack.

Craig Stevens, a broad shouldered man with a thick moustache and gut to match, and Adam Umanoff, a man of slighter build and possessed of a virtually beautiful face, stood in cold, dead silence as they were confronted by a third party. A big man, the shoulders of his jacket straining at the seams, appeared in the doorway leading to the main room, a fist full of bills held tightly in his hand.

"Christ it's cold," Craig said nervously, breaking the stony silence. What's the charge? The man slowly held up one finger. Craig dug into his hip pocket and pulling out a wad of bills, quickly drew off a one and handed it to the man. Adam fumbled with his wallet for a moment deciding whether to break a five or ten dollar bill.

"C'mon, Craig said in a demanding tone, "we'll never get in there at this rate."

Adam handed the man a five dollar bill and calmly waited for the change.

"Can I see your I.D." the doorman said, fixing his eye on Adam.

"Yeah, sure," he said, and was once again sent searching through his wallet to find some proof of age.

"He's over twenty-one," Craig said. "For Chrissakes, we spent two years in Nam together in the service and we've been back for over two."

"Just a precaution," The words flowed from his mouth like sterile orbs of sound, each bulb bursting with apathy as they reached their ears.

The hair on the back of Craig's neck stood on end. They always did that when he felt that he was out of control of a situation. He paced aimlessly in that small cavity like a caged lion awaiting the feeder. Adam handed the man his license, received his change, and the two made the slow descent into the murky atmosphere of the shadowless room.

"Precaution, shit!" Craig said judging himself to be just out of earshot. That guy just wanted to give us a hassle. I bet you he's laughing his fool head off right now!"

"C'mon now Craig, take it easy, he was just going his job." And Adam softly nudged him further into the club. They walked down the few steps emptying into the vacant dance floor. The band was between sets and the congested silence that hung over the crowd hovered like a nebulous swarm of flies above a carrion, interrupted only by the dissonant fracas of broken glasses and drunken pleas for another drink.

"Hey, there's a table over there," Adam said pointing to a table in a far corner of the room.

"No, too far from it all. There!" Adam hardly had time to look when he found himself propelled toward a table where two people were preparing to leave. A bit leery of this maneuver, Adam politely asked the couple to excuse them as Craig immediately sunk into a vacant chair. A waitress soon came to the table. She was a pretty girl, much too pretty to be a barmaid. She was more the travel poster type, her bright engaging smile and sparkling eyes setting her more at home in a meadow in Sweden than in a dusty barroom. Her long blonde hair was tied back save for a few wisps of gold which, eluding her hairband, fell delicately at the sides of her neck.

"Can I get you anything?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'll have a Molson Golden Ale please," Adam said nervously.

"And you, sir."

"Uh, give me a shot of Jack Daniels and a draft."

"We don't serve draft here," she said unconsciously wrinkling her nose. Adam was dumbfounded; never before had he seen such a cute nose, such a captivating woman. His thoughts gave way to dreams and his dreams to wonder as he effortlessly stopped time and with his eyes outlined the contours of her body. He lost all track of time and may have stayed there transfixed like that forever had he not been jarred by the voice of his companion.

"Uh, make it a Schlitz, then." The walls of Adam's realm dissipated into dust as he found himself gazing into the smoldering ashes of a cigarette.

"Ah, there's only one way to start a night and that's"...the words fell mute under the clamor of a drumroll as the houselights went out and the band took the stage.

Continuously they played as the four tired figures clung to their instruments as a marionette to its strings. Continuously the waitresses jetted from table to table as the people slowly emerged from the bittersweet gloom of their daily lives. The music poured from four huge speakers encircling the room like a thick dark sludge descending on the people as they struggled for their lives, clutching at the cigarettes and drinks, trying to preserve their wretched existence.



Repeatedly throughout the night the girl came and went from the table, laden each time with a Schlitz bottle and a shot glass, either full or empty depending upon which way she was traveling. The house lights flickered on as the wave of music subsided. Craig silently peered over Adam's shoulder, watching the people as they crowded around the jukebox. He sat motionless in his chair, arms crossed, rhythmically tapping his chin with a half empty Schlitz bottle he held in his hand. He remained that way for quite some time and then, as if reminded of an appointment, he pointed the bottle in the direction of the jukebox and with a nod of his head arose from his chair.

"I'm gonna go see what they've got on that thing. Uh, you got a quarter? I'm flat broke."

"Sure," Adam said, as he dug into his pocket and slid a quarter out and along the table. "Here."

"Any request?"

"No thanks, anything you pick will be just fine with me," Adam said and turning his head watched Craig meander his way to the bar.

Song after song blasted from the Dance-O-Matic till it seemed there would be no end to the deafening tribute to the thousands of nickels, dimes and quarters sacrificed for the sake of music. Adam watched the crowd, looking for his waitress and found her clearing a vacant table by the bar. Then as if out of nowhere she was there, standing next to him.

"What would you like?" she said. Her words flowed like a mountain stream splashed in his face like a gentle mist.

"Huh, what, pardon me?"

"I said, would you like another drink?"

"Why?" Adam said, in great confusion.

"Oh..I don't know, maybe there might be a fire on your table, or maybe you're thirsty. Besides, you called me."

"Did I, I didn't notice if I did. I'm terribly sorry," he said, totally confused, then thinking for a moment said, Well, I will have another Molson, thank you."

"Sure," she said and walked back toward the bar.

As she left Craig returned, a shot of Jack Daniels slung loosely in his hand.

"What did you play, anything?" Adam asked as Craig returned to the table. Craig, feeling for the chair with his free hand began his slow descent to his seat.

"I thought you were broke," Adam said lightly, pointing his chin at the shot glass.

"Oh ya, just had enough. Oh, here," Craig said as a nickel fell to the table.

"I owe you twenty."

"That's quite alright," Adam replied grinning and shaking his head in familiar disbelief. He looked down at his long empty bottle, looking up in time to see his waitress carrying a trayful of drinks above and past the heads of the crowd standing by the bar. She made her way to his table and placing the bottle down said, "That'll be \$1.25 please."

Adam handed her two dollars which sent her filing through her change glass until he told her to keep it and in the same breath asked her when the band was coming back on.

"Probably tomorrow, that was their last set, they're not really in demand here, people would rather listen to that damned box. Can't really say that I blame them though, those guys are pretty bad," she said picking up the empties as she left.

Adam's gaze once again fell to the bottle of ale held firmly in his hand. Allowing his mind to wander, he became lost in its obscure patterns. He caught a bubble and riding it to the top, dove down again to catch another one and still another, finally laying to rest on his bed of bubbles, peering out into the light green world.

Like a shot the monotonous clamor of the crowd was arrested by a piercing scream. Adam looked out from his bottle to see what had happened. Bubbles burst all around him, bathing his face in a cool mist, awakening him from his dream. Adam's eyes shot up; where is she he said to himself. Scanning the room, he found her weaving her way through the crowd, tray full of empties suspended above her head, visibly growing heavier as she neared the bar. Looking from side to side he saw where the scream had come from. There was a large table full of men surrounding a lone female, slapping and reprimanding each man in a silly, infantile manner. The woman was drenched with beer and was showing signs of quieting down when another suspicious looking bottle rose above her head. Immediately, the woman resumed her screaming, followed by fits of laughter on the part of the men.

Craig, who heard the cries and had turned to watch the spectacle, muttered in drunken self-righteousness, "the slut, look at her carrying on like that, ranting and raving like a schoolgirl. That's all she wants, attention. She's eatin' that shit up, and so are they; goddamn studs, studs every one of them. They're only after one thing and it doesn't matter how they get it and by whom, just so long as it's inexpensive and available. Those goddam studs have no taste, why just look at her, unintelligent, unsexy and just plain unappealing. But over here," Craig said, pointing to the blonde waitress, a hint of lust in his voice, "here we have a woman," the whole mood of his voice changing.



"What a piece," he said as he watched her slim figure cutting its way through the crowd, "How would you like to take that home with you?" Adam, who had been pretending not to hear him, said, "What?" "I said, how would you like to take that home with you?" Craig blurted out Adam, aware of the volume of Craig's voice and the rustling of chairs and an increasing murmur quickly looked around at the people seated near him, only to be met with cold glaring eyes. They had heard everything. As for Craig, the defiant stares and incriminating gestures fell mute upon the crippled senses of a drunkard as he continued to speak.

"Ah, I'd like to have her sit on..." Before he could finish, Adam, in a vain attempt to calm Craig down, said, "C'mon now Craig, take it easy, let's not be lewd. She happens to be a human being."

"Human being ya, but she's a female and you know what they're good for, only one thing."

"Listen," Adam said, trying his best not to upset him, "you can't resign yourself to going around talking about people in this manner."

"Enh! she's a barmaid," Craig said in an effort to close the conversation. Anger welled up inside of Adam as he thought of that last remark. The nerve of that man, calling his Madonna a barmaid, treating her as if less than human.

"Who the hell are you?" Adam said, his bitter calculated gaze piercing Craig's armor, turning the tides.

"What did you say?" Craig replied.

"I said, who the hell are you to play God? Who died and left you the almighty judge of character?" Adam felt that he had him. He watched as Craig sat back in his chair, rubbing the back of his neck, looking back at Adam with cold hollow eyes. Craig held Adam's eyes with his while he slowly sat up in his chair and then leaned forward. For an instant Adam noticed a bottle in Craig's hand.

Adam awoke in a cold sweat, his sheets soaked with perspiration as he sat up gasping for breath. Blindly he felt to his right to touch the warm, silken body of the woman he loved. The faint glow of the moonlight danced upon her golden hair, and hid his scars. He felt for the dial of the clock on the night table; it was 3:30 a.m. He went back to sleep.

John F. McHugh

## A Wasted Man's Strings

Hubie walked like a quiet puppet into the dawn of twilight;  
He twisted and turned to the whim of shimmering  
Wires that glinted under a rising moon's slight  
Fingers of glimmering madness.  
Sadness--like a clown's whitened face,  
And lost little boys coming last in a race.  
A mystery pulling a wasted man's strings,  
Disgusting that thing inside...  
Abiding his time 'till the end,  
Crying in the dust 'till he bended and seemed  
To rust  
A wasted man's dream.  
All in vain, all in vain,  
For the master was no master of fate--  
Just a god-man all the while  
As those who rate,  
And pulls the strings of a child.

Scott E. Roth

I saw an old, crumpled man flash in the torrents of a raging river,  
 But i saw the silver of his hair and the gleam in his eyes  
 That shone blazing like fire-stars that wink in the haze of a glimmer.  
 I saw him fall from the worm-rotted bridge, but i saw him fly  
 Like a sparrow in the splash...

Maybe it was fear that so tore and ripped him down,  
 A vertigo that only comes of spying your own reflection  
 In the swirling, bubbling pools of a mysterious sound.  
 But maybe, just maybe, it was always the muted drumbeat of ones  
 Own heart murmuring in a sparkling brook...

I can only guess, but the i always knows a longing,  
 A thing of wonder so strong in the wills of those  
 Possessed with a greater thing inside than the stale songs.  
 Yes, he floundered as we all rage against the woes  
 Of that good night, but the i still lived and lived...

They found him later on that lazy summer day;  
 His swollen body snagged in a tangle of broken limbs  
 That were dashed and battered by the jagged ways of rock.  
 But still his watery eyes gleamed the rays of his whim:  
 An i so dear that even in death it was with him again  
 and again and again...

Scott E. Roth

## The Stain

He did not merely walk into the cafe, he defiantly strode in and impatiently tapped his cane against his upper left thigh. He was tall and slender. He wore his tailored beige suit with an aura of bored sophistication. The light blue shirt he wore was accompanied by a tie of the same color that offset not only the shirt, but also his insolent blue eyes. He studied the surrounding tables, and his eyes rested upon the lone woman. The cane tapped harder and faster and the quick, slapping sound could be heard by the woman. As he approached her table she could see the hard lines around his eyes and the ugly manner in which his thin lips were pursed.

The woman sat back in her chair and uttered a tired, defeated sigh. The soft, orange material of her sweater lay tight across her breasts and revealed their beautiful form. Her long, polished nails glistened in the sun, which was emitted from the window next to her. She leaned against the table and watched the oncoming man.

The man had reached the table, but had not seated himself. He stood across from her and gave her a tired look. Her eyes did not waver from the glance, and she quietly greeted him.

"Hell, Raymond, please sit down," she said.

"Marion, what is it this time?" he asked thickly.

He remained standing and his right hand clutched the back of the chair. The whiteness of his knuckles reminded her of a Halloween she shared with her youth, and suddenly she was once again silly and blissfully ignorant. The dancing skeletons in the haunted house were meant to frighten the daring and the bold, but she was with a young man, in love, and nothing frightened her. Strange, she thought, how those violent hands remind me of happiness. Raymond's arrogant and mercurial voice interrupted her thoughts.

"What is it this time, I repeat?" He was seated and writing for her to reply.

"Raymond, I realize my behavior lately has been irrational...Raymond, please."

He was watching a graceful young woman who was walking across the dining room and his gaze held the same admiration it once held for the woman he was sitting with. She acknowledged this to herself, but did not let her face reveal this avowal.

"I'm listening my dear, will you please continue?"

"Raymond, there is something..." she was once again interrupted.

"By the way, Marion, did you comb your hair this morning?"

"My God, there is something wrong with me, please hear me," she begged.

"My love," he sarcastically replied, there is always something wrong with you. I am extremely tired of your whining and your grievances. I am tired of your intangible problems, and I am tired of your continual quests for, allow me to quote that worn cliché, 'the real me.'"

"My cat died this morning," she said, "I buried her in the back yard. I held that dirty animal in my arms for two hours. You can help me. You alone can help me, because you're a part of me that is alive. Aren't you?" her tone was pleading.

He looked at her once beautiful face and was repulsed by the naked beseeching he found in her eyes, and the weakness in her pliant mouth. This woman, he thought, was so strong. She was a strong woman, I was a strong man, and together we were invincible. Christ, I'm old. Her hair, why can't she comb her hair?

"I love you," she said. She picked up her purse and searched for her cigarettes. She took out her keys, her comb, and, finally, a broken cigarette.

He wondered, as she placed the cigarette in the ashtray, what she really needed. He knew what he didn't need and he knew what he didn't want.

"I'm leaving." The defiance and arrogance was lacking in his tone. She said nothing and stared ahead of her. Her eyes were unseeing.

He rose slowly and pushed back his chair. He picked up his cane and placed it on his forearm.

"Order anything you wish, I will pay the waiter before I leave."

She did not reply, and he did not wait to hear an answer. His blue eyes were no longer insolent, and they held tears which he did not allow to flow.

He walked towards the door, and she glanced up at his retreating figure. She noticed a dark spot on his coat, which spoiled his impeccable appearance. The cane he proudly carried was beginning to warp with the constant use, and a chip marred the would-be perfect shine.

Marrianne Dandley

## Pop

Silent, cold, weary,  
silence SPLINTERED  
Excited yips,  
Melodious barking,  
Pop  
calls out--Good dogs  
Shiner and Queenie on the trail  
The rabbit pursued  
Briar patches,  
Cracking, snapping branches.  
Silence  
Shiner and Queenie--and  
Pop  
Is gone too.  
NO  
As long as there is me  
Shiner and Queenie give chase,  
But best of all there is  
Pop  
and  
Me.

Myles E. Geer



# Power

To me, power is exhilarating. Power is exciting, strong, and in a way impossible to resist. Being able to control my own body is power; to make my body perform the way that I want it to perform is power. Forget about money power or political power, the power I want is the power to control my own body.

The first time that I actually realized all of this and actually thought it through was on Jasper Beach on the Maine coast. Until this time, my thoughts of power were vague concepts that would not formulate themselves into beliefs. Jasper Beach is a beach approximately one mile long with rocky ledges and cliffs at its ends. It has no similarities to a sandy beach other than the fact that it borders the ocean. Jasper Beach is composed of tiny pebbles and is the most beautiful beach in the world. This beach signified to me the power of nature. It is stark and physical.

I used to run up and down this beach instead of walking because it took too long to walk from one end to the other. Actually, this wasn't the main reason. I wanted to run. Running along Jasper Beach imparted to me my first conceptual feelings of power. The exact day that I felt the power in me that I could use was in a July in a summer a few years ago.

The sun was hot and I could sense its presence without looking to see where it was. It was very high in the sky and a little off to the right, over the water. As I turned towards it, the front of my body, and especially my face, was warmed. I could see the sun even when my eyes were closed. It shone right through my eyelids with a warm, red glow.

The air was cool and as it flowed across the small ocean waves, it picked up their brackish scent. This salty breeze, mixed with the individual scents of the various debris strewn along the high tide mark, created a very quiet and peaceful wandering sensation within me.

These elements, the sun and the breeze, seemed to draw from me a rising sensation of power. They tantalized me with the thought of beating the beach. I watched as the waves rolled in, scattering the tiny pebbles of Jasper Beach. I felt the rise of excitement. I felt strength and purpose as I prepared myself for the run to beat the beach. When the excitement reached a point where I could no longer contain it, I began to run.

My pace was regular and my breaths were ordered according to my steps. My strides were, of necessity, exaggerated because running on pebbles was hard, much harder than running on firm ground. Every thrust of a leg had to be multiplied by two in order to achieve the same results that running on firm ground could provide. The pebbles gave way with each footfall and clattered like thousands of marbles banging into one another. The muscles in my feet and calves strained to remain firm on the yielding beach. The end of the beach seemed almost unattainable at first and no progress was noted, but as I moved on, it approached with amazing speed. I reached the end of the beach and turned back to look at the symbol of my victory. The beach stretched out behind me.

I felt the joy of being able to master my body. I felt the power of victory over the beach. I felt a peaceful feeling of exhaustion. The beach seemed almost to applaud as the myriads of pebbles were hurled into one another.

I laid down on the beach and let the sun and the breeze compete with one another. The sun would roast me, forcing out the sweat until I felt that I would dissolve into the pebbles. Then the breeze would come to blow away the heat and the sweat and the cycle would repeat itself again and again. After I had enjoyed my success for about an hour or so, I began to examine the little pebbles that had made my victory so hard to earn. I fingered their water-worn sides and examined their varieties of shape, pattern, and color. I filled my pockets with these little trophies, my cool, damp gems. I started a slow walk back down the beach, calm, satisfied, and happy, retracing the vague imprints left on the surface of Jasper Beach.

Rich Girouard

You walk along fair beaches,  
with the wind blowing in your hair,  
the sand catches in your ears and mouth,  
the salt accompanies the sand,  
but when you kiss me, the salt runs away in tears,  
when you touch my face with your lips  
the sand falls to the ground as dreams;  
I wish we could just lie down in the warmth  
of the sun soaked sand,  
which is bottled in the salt of your tears,  
and the sand of your dreams--  
To laugh and touch the sky with our minds,  
to cry and bury our sorrows in rain;  
But how can we have rain and sun  
How can we have dreams and tears  
How can we have joy and meaning  
How can we be in love.

Before the day  
when twilight was tripping  
over the trash cans  
in the alley  
and sunlight  
was choking  
from the sweltering heat,  
I lay naked beside my lover  
and laughed  
at it all.

Green leaves that are hung  
from the trees and are  
gazed at through a dirt screen  
remind me of a black girl hung  
from a dead tree  
and of people gazing through closed doors,  
which all relate to blonde hair  
hung from a confused head and gazed  
at by narrow eyes.

Jane L. Semien

One day I took a prose statement, a perfectly acceptable thing written in ordinary line  
form extending left to right from margin to margin,  
And put it into verse form

where

it

Blossomed.

Lynne Deeds

## A Bright Sun-Shiny Day

It was a dark and empty Friday afternoon when James entered the donut shop. There were very few customers there, as could be expected. All the booths were empty, save one near the door occupied by a young mother and her little girl. The counter was likewise empty, except for a policeman talking to an elderly gentleman, huddled over their coffees in the far corner of the shop.

James sat at the counter stool nearest to the door and ordered a regular coffee. He'd just received it, when he felt a burning stare stinging the back of his neck. He turned and saw the little girl recoil shyly.

The girl was no more than three years old. She had short blonde hair and deep blue eyes that were now focused thirty miles in back of him. When he had first come in, the child had been playing with a salt shaker, singing insults under her breath at her oblivious mother across the table. The woman was totally absorbed in the latest issue of the Wall Street Journal.

There was a terribly long moment when James and the child waited for a response from the other. Then James took the initiative. He first checked both sides of him, then wrinkled up his nose and stuck out his tongue.

The child blinked--fanning the rising glow in her face to bright flame. She proceeded by squinting her eyes and revealing all her teeth in a Cheshire Cat grin, wrinkling her nose in the process. James returned in like with a wide grin topped by a painfully cross-eyed stare.

The child started to giggle, but in her revelry, she knocked over the salt shaker, arousing her mother's attention. In one swift motion, the woman snatched up the salt shaker and slapped the child on the head. Then, she glanced at her watch, folded up her paper, and scurried out of the shop with the paper under one arm and the child under the other.

Watching it all, James let out a long drawn-out sigh, and turned around to face the counter. He picked up his cup and speculatively sipped at the cold coffee, while reading a sign on the far wall. Then, in one quick gulp, he finished the cup and stood up. Hurriedly, he paid the bill and ran out into the rain.

The wind blew the falling rain into her face like needles from a Gatlin gun. Teresa shrunk down into her hooded parka and made a mad dash for the front door. Upon entering, she fumbled with the zipper on her coat, annoyed at how her glasses suddenly fogged up. After hanging it on the coatrack to her left, she stopped to wipe her glasses on her sweater.

Upon doing so, she squinted, trying to survey the situation. At the far end of the room, two women sat at a small round table. Karen sat at the side nearest Teresa, dealing cards like a misplaced Mississippi gambler. Joann was at her right, smoking a cigarette. As they looked up, Teresa began breathlessly, "Sorry I'm late, I rished as fast as I could." As Teresa approached, Karen replied, "I was just starting to deal...Helen's in the kitchen getting coffee."

Just as she reached her seat across from Joann, Helen entered, carrying a serving tray containing a coffee pot surrounded by blue china cups and saucers. She was a slim woman in her late thirties, wearing a dazzlingly beautiful print dress, which seemed to match the decor. For as long as Teresa had known her, Helen overwhelmed her with her presence. Her theatrical manner so impressed Teresa, that whenever she came over, she looked at the floor to make sure that she wasn't tripping over any footlights.

Helen spoke first. "Hello, Teresa, I'm glad to see you've made it." She then started distributing the cups around the table. "I'm trying a new brand of coffee, so I'm anxious to get your impressions...by the way, who's bid is it?"

Joann replied, "It's Teresa's. Oh, did you meet the new family that moved into the Johnson's house? They seem to be such a nice COUPLE!" This last part seemed to be directed across the table at Teresa, but Teresa was too busy puzzling over her card hand to catch the meaning.



"Jim said that the husband's being placed in his research group," Helen said as she filled Joann's cup. "We'll definitely have to get her into our little group." Teresa was still puzzled over the apparent clue from her partner. "Teresa," Helen interjected as she filled a new cup, "is it one lump or two?" "Oh...no, I'll have mine with just cream," she offered distantly. She was starting to get annoyed at her indecision.

The room suddenly grew still. Teresa looked up as Karen cleared her throat and saw Helen glaring at her furiously. She faltered. "Oh, how silly of me," she said with a nervous giggle, "of course, I'll have two lumps as usual!"

The entire afternoon went by slowly after that. Teresa, for a long time, avoided everyone's eyes by watching the pendulum of a clock on the wall across the room. Then, looking lower -- at the small table below it -- she noticed something.

On the table were two close-up photographic portraits, one of James and one of Helen. There was a large space in between them. In this space was a small styrofoam replica of Frosty the Snowman, left over from Christmas.

"It's three o'clock...the kids should be getting home," Teresa said desperately trying to get the image out of her head. "Yes, children are always a terrible bother," Joann replied, but it was Helen's response that was disturbing. Her eyes grew suddenly distant and her statement was strangely wistful, "I know."

This strange moment was shortlived however, because a car screeched into place in front of the house. A car door slammed shut and alien footsteps trampled up the walk towards the front door. Karen echoed everyone's thoughts by blurting, "Whoever do you suppose that could be?" Then the door opened and a man rushed in, dressed in hat and trenchcoat and carrying an attache case.

James put his attache case down on the stool by the coatrack, removed his dripping coat and hat, and hung them to dry. Turning, he noticed the women staring intently at him, and inanely spoke up. "Boy! It's really coming down!" Helen seemed extremely annoyed at his entrance.

"What are you doing home so early?" She gave him an icy stare. James was taken aback at his cold reception and answered flippantly, "I've snuck in to catch you in the midst of some sordid act." Helen's face grew flushed at this. She got up and started walking towards James. An apparent confrontation was about to take place.

"That wasn't very funny...what do you mean by 'really coming down'?" she demanded as she approached her husband. "I think it's raining...at least it's wet enough to be." He grinned triumphantly. If Helen's face was red before, now it was purple. It took a tremendous amount of willpower for her to remain relatively calm and rational. "James, don't make a fool out of me...especially in front of my friends," she thrust at him.

He realized that he'd gone too far. He turned away from her and took a step forward towards the easy chair, but she jumped forward and blocked his way. "Listen, I'm not making a fool out of anyone...I just want to read the paper," he remonstrated. Helen was not to be turned away. "In other words, I'm making the fool out of myself. James, I feel so sorry for you."

Meanwhile, Joann had been anxiously watching the enfolding drama from her ringside position by the door. Something clicked in her mind. She turned and motioned to Karen to be quiet. Then, she slithered over to the coatrack and picked up the stool and attache case. Handing the attache case to Karen, she then crept slowly over to the easy chair, packing off the short distance. Raising the stool high above her head, her eyes met Helen's for one agonizing moment; then she brought the stool down as hard as she could.

When James managed to focus his eyes, he saw that Helen was standing above him with her hands behind her back. At first he thought that his arms had fallen asleep, but now he saw why he couldn't move them. Both Joann and Karen were sitting on each outstretched arm, pinning him to the chair. James wasn't too sure he could move anyway. Every hair on his head was moaning in sympathy with the agony of his scalp. There was most probably a serious concussion. Helen seemed surprisingly calm and much too composed. Her gaze met his as he raised his head. "It's not raining."

"Waht?" He had been expecting a much different and stronger statement. "We always have our bridge game on a warm sunny Friday afternoon at one P.M. with the damper closed. We find it sufficient, but you, like all gluttons, stir the coals in search of even more heat. It's unnecessary; in fact, it makes it quite uncomfortable. With this, she pulled a long shiny pair of shears from behind her back. "James, I can't let you disrupt our bridge games again." Then the impossible happened. Helen plated both feet sturdily, graped the shears in both hands, extending them at arm's length. James watched as she raised them in one slow ceremonious arc, until he lost sight of it -- and the room.

Suddenly, he was in the playground of his old grade school. A ring of small children encircled him. They were playing ring-around-the-roses. Down they fell with a clatter of laughter, but James' attention was not focused upon the game. It was trained upon a dark hooded figure sitting on a bench by the schoolyard gate. He had an overwhelming desire to expose the person behind the cloak. "Come back!" the children cried shrilly to no avail, as he marched forward as if in a trance. It wasn't until he neared the bench that the figure looked up. It was a woman, incredibly aged with a teardrop extending down from an already rheumy eye. It was Helen.

She rushed for the kitchen. It was unexpectedly messy. There wasn't just blood on the shears, but drops that ran up the length of her arm like moth holes. Dropping the shears in the sink, she picked up a soap pad and scrubbed the length of her arm for several moments. Then she picked up the rinsing hose and let the water cascade down from her shoulder.

Teresa had been no more than five steps away throughout the entire ordeal. She had been frozen in place; unable even to avert her eyes. There he lay, rather forlornly. She walked numbly towards the coatrack, watching him all the time. Picking up the still damp trench coat, she returned to the chair and placed it over him, tucking it gently under his chin.

"Teresa, it's your bid." She spun around to see Helen and the others sitting serenely in their designated places. It took her a minute before she could speak, and she felt faint. "No, it's getting late. I've got to start Leroy's supper, so I have to be going." Then she added, "Oh, I'll call you tomorrow for that cake recipe."

"Same time?"

"As always."

Teresa walked unsteadily back to the coatrack. Putting on her coat, she turned again to face the table. "Well, I've got to be going." Helen became very gracious. "Teresa, thanks again so much for the coffee. It was delicious! I'll have to buy some." Teresa zipped up her coat. "Bye."

Standing in front of the door, she stole a glance at the players, then fumbled in her coat pocket, removing a long-unused plastic rain scarf. Fastening it around her head, she was gone.

John Zygilewicz

#### RECIPE

Anyway, the first thing to ask any pet salesman is, "Is it house-broken?" This is especially important when inquiring after domesticated turtles. Also it is helpful to know whether the turtle in question takes high octane or low lead. When making a major turtle-purchase, the phase of the moon is very important. Unbeknownst to most people, the fastidious turtle is often given to unreasoning outbursts of melancholy, at which time they have been known to make small chirping sounds and languidly turn over on their backs. If this should happen to your turtle, the only reasonable course of action available to you is to grasp the turtle gently but firmly by the left testicle and pour tabasco sauce over it. Add a pinch of sage, a drop of olive oil, and shake well, being careful not to bruise its nose. Place the turtle on a steaming pilaf of organic rice and serve with a garnish of horse radish. After all, if it refuses to behave in an acceptable pet-like manner, you can at least get your money's worth by having turtle-turnover on the half-shell. Serve with slightly chilled sparkling Dr. Pepper and voila! Your meal is complete! Bon Appetit!



# May Water

"Forget it, Mac," said my father from somewhere underneath his Sunday paper. I was sure that he had to close his eyes through the paper because the sun was so brilliant on that glorious May Sunday. "For Christ's sake, Mac, it's only May, the water is still much too cold for swimming." It seemed to me as I walked back to the edge of the lake, that I had heard that argument last year too. As I stood on the pier shadowed by the tall pines, I looked down to the cool and opaque wavelets that rippled against the side of the pier with little popping noises. God, how I wanted to go in and glide through the refreshing water. It's still cold, though, I thought, and I hate the cold shock of entering the water almost as much as I enjoy swimming through it.

John, the most football oriented person I knew, walked up beside me on the pier. He had his football under his arm, removed it and tossed it in a perfect spiral behind his back and over his shoulder, catching it deftly with his other hand. I knew what his question would be and as he faked a pass, he asked it, "Do you wanta play football?" I asked him unconsciously as I eyed his massive bulk. Are you crazy? Who wants to play football with a steamroller? He seemed to answer my unasked question, "Jerry and Dale are waiting over at the field, we need a couple more guys."

"Naw," I said, "Do you wanta go swimming?"

Surprised that I should be thinking anything other than football, he asked, "You crazy? It's still freezin' cold, I ain't goin' in till next month. I'd rather play football anyway."

"It's only cold at first, then it's nice and cool," I said, trying to convince myself and him at the same time.

"Forget it, Mac," he said, "I'll be over in the field if you wanta play ball."

I nodded my head slowly to show that I was aware of his departure and continued to stare at the water. It was so damned cold. I wanted to go in, but there was no one around to share courage with. It always seemed easier to do something daring when there was someone else doing it too. It must be the psychology of numbers or something like that.

Alone, I sat down on the ground about ten feet from the water and contemplated the May water. A cool breeze rushed through the woods like a tidal wave. The trees bent and rustled as the breeze forced its way through and around and over their branches. The water wrinkled as the breeze hit and tugged at its surface. Then it was gone as quickly as it had come. The water calmed and the trees stilled themselves. The breeze seemed to have left me the courage I needed to force myself to go in the cold May water. My mind was convinced, all that I needed was a little extra surge of will to convince my nerves and body that they could overcome the cold shock.

It was an instant decision that sent me flying down to the water's edge. I planted my toes on the edge of the pier and sprang out fast so that I could get the most speed and distance from my dive. The May water looked cold and hard and then I hit it with a cold slap. My skin tightened and I could feel the goose bumps shoot up my back, across my shoulders and into my hairline, where their impact was absorbed. I was still under the water in my dive position with my hands stretched out in front of me and pointed downwards. The May water was still cold, but I was becoming accustomed to it. I opened my eyes in the murky twilight that so contrasted with the brilliance of the sky above. I took my first stroke and the water felt good. I was flying fast under the water. I felt cool and I wanted to stay under the water as long as I could. My legs, like scissors, snapped shut, opened, and snapped shut again and again. My arms reached out and pulled the water towards me, five, ten, fifteen strokes, and my throat began to ache. I controlled it and a cloud of dark hit my eyes, cleared, and then hit again. I forced myself to take more strokes and then, I arched my back and soared to the surface.

The air was warm and I rolled onto my back and closed my eyes to the bright sun. I looked to see how far I had gone. About seventy-five feet, which wasn't too bad for the first time of the year. I rested for a few seconds and then I gulped down a fresh quantity of air and dove down to the bottom. My ears hurt as I went deeper and deeper. At about twenty feet, I leveled off and began to skim the bottom. There weren't too many weeds yet, and I passed a bucket that was half buried in the silt. It was dark down twenty feet from the sun, a fish flashed in my peripheral vision and I was unable to tell what kind it was. I felt that I was flying, quietly and smoothly. I felt that I was strong and fast. I could stay down forever, but I kicked off of the bottom and shot to the surface like a rocket and broke the water. I felt streamlined like a bird and I raced to the pier in my unprofessional free-style.



Standing on the pier, I felt cold and as I looked back to the May water, it no longer seemed inviting. Instead, it looked cold and hard. I began to shiver and the breeze that had given me my original courage returned to take it back. I no longer wanted to slice through the May water, I wanted to get as far from it as possible. I ran the whole quarter of a mile to the field before I began to feel warm and secure again.

Richard Girouard

## Listen!

Listen!

Can you hear the drop of a pin  
The church bell's din...din...din  
The hop of a cricket among the weeds  
Beneath the earth, the sprouting seeds?

If you can't you never will hear  
The roar of the ocean as the surf draws near  
The blending of voices raised in song  
And fourth of July fireworks as the crackle  
along.

Listen!

Can you hear the heartbeat of an unborn life  
A human mind that's filled with strife?  
If you can't hear a breeze blow by  
You won't hear your soul go by.

Michael Gaston

# Jacob

The sun was kind, but winter would not be held back much longer. The ground was already frozen which made walking seem like an endless trek over cement. Soon the snow would come and seal the mountain in a white void. The hectic pace of spring and summer had already diminished to a slight flurry of motion.

The smoke rose from the cabin to form shapes that dance and swirled to and fro about twenty feet above the roof. It put on a patterned gymnastic show for a few moments, then it would fade into the wind but there was always more to fill the space.

The cold wind ripped at my face, my hands were tucked deep into the warm womb of my coat. The journey was long but my end was in sight. The cabin stood as strong and timeless as the gods' mansion on Mt. Olympus. Soon there would be hot coffee, a place by the fire, and an endless flow of conversation from Jacob. I had been making the trip up the mountain since I was a small boy. Jacob had always been my shelter from the storms of life. Life with all its confusion and pitfalls could not rob me of that man. He was a life that was real. A life that no professor could teach even if he knew what it was like, which I don't think they do.

Jacob was the kind of man who felt money was for spending, not for making more money. He'd say "give me a million dollars and it will be gone in a week's time but it will take me years to tell all I'd done with it." Jacob could have sat and swapped stories with the best of them. Sometimes I would wonder how much was pure fact and how much had grown from the time it happened; still it was the man I went to hear, not the stories. Jacob was a kind man, yet to see him he gave you the impression of a hardened frontiersman with massive amounts of hair everywhere except on the peak of his head. I believe in his prime there were powerful muscles under all that hair, but age had turned them soft. Still, soft or hard, it was the spirit that demanded respect. I, for one, would not want to be the victim of his wrath.

Jacob met me at the door; "been hearing you coming for the last five minutes. If you had lived when this land was new and fresh you would not have lasted eighteen years."

He was dressed in a haggared blue flannel shirt with the front neatly tucked in, but the back was flapping like an old woman's tongue. His pants, no doubt, had been a constant and close companion to him for years, yet he still had a look of reverence about him.

We got our coffee and sat ourselves down by the fire. Nothing more was said until we had ourselves in our assigned places by the fire. It was a standing rule that no stories or anything else of any importance would be discussed until we were in the places provided for it.

He leaned forward in his chair, his right elbow laying on his right knee and his arm arched to keep his head from falling off. He gave you the overall impression of a hairy version of the "Thinker". "You know, Mike, I almost couldn't get up this morning. I just couldn't get out of bed. I fell just last week when I was trying to bring in some wood... Damn it, I'm just getting plain old."

I made the foolish suggestion that he move into town and stay with me.

He just laughed, "Can you see me down there with all them pilgrims? Why they wouldn't know what to do with an old buck like me. The world is set up for young people like you. There is no place for a man when he can no longer produce. No, this is where I lived all my life, this is where I'll die, but thanks kindly for the thought."

I knew only too well what he meant. It's hard to grow old, but it is even harder to swallow pride. When a man has spent his life depending on himself alone, it is almost impossible to start depending on others as the end of his days draw near.

He looked at me with conviction in his eyes and said, "I'm going to meet my maker standing on my feet, not on my back. This has been the last growing season for me. My life has spanned a considerable amount of years and it has been good. I'm not going to ruin it now with pain. You know the tradition of my family, so I want your help!"

There was a rush of emotion starting in my feet, flooding up to my throat where it stuck. My eyes burned and fear engulfed my whole being. I knew what was now to happen. I wanted to say no, I wanted to say I can't, but I just nodded my head yes.

I spent the night just staring at the ceiling. So many thoughts ran through my head. I knew he was right, but that did not make it any easier.

Morning came too quickly. We sat and had coffee, talking about the old Morgan he once had. After coffee, I took my backpack, he took nothing and we went outside. In a matter of moments the cabin was a massive torch set by my own hands. We sat in silence and watched a generation burn. When the ashes were just starting to cool, we rose, took one last look and walked away. We walked in silence to the fork in the path just south of the cabin. I went left towards the town and he went right towards the deep woods. I don't know if he stopped or look back, because I did not.

An era had come to an end.



# Googly Goo

The moon was all aglow and the stars twinkled in the sky. A light lullaby caused the trees to gently rock; when suddenly from the faraway plains of the Old West echoed the clippity clop of a pony's hoofs, and the cry of, "Awake, Stovey, Awake."

Yes, tonight that fearless horseman of the night would ride again. You may never have heard of Googly Goo, but of all the heroes of the West, he was the best. Googly Goo stood a full two foot two, unruly hair, a happy smile without a care. A two pin diaper and one low slung pistol was all he wore. It was all he needed to protect the persecuted and punish their prosecutors.

Because of his youth it was necessary to keep his identity a secret; a secret shared only by the President of the United States and his own Mommy and Daddy. The call for Googly was the soft strains of a Brahms melody as only Mommy could render it.

Tonight's adventure for Googly and his snow black steed called Stovey was to be a touchy. His long time nemesis, Victor the Vicious, was on the prowl. Victor was as mean as they come; he pulled puppy dog's tails and poked pencils into the canary's cage when he was a little boy. And now he had graduated to bandit cum laude. Victor was no ordinary bad guy because very shrewdly he hid behind the daytime facade of a good guy; his cover was beautiful, president of a college.

The local Teacher's Credit Union was the target for tonight, and poor old Pete the manager was there all alone. The people of the village had worked very hard, lived quite frugally and because of this, had massed a fortune of 32 cents, all of which was on deposit at the good old T.C.U. The building was in the shape of a huge piggy, pink with blue dots and a door right in the middle of the back. Old Pete was sitting behind his desk giving thanks to the Great Provider for His generosity in making Victor Veracious their president, or is it Victor Voracious. Always get those two words mixed up.

Reverting to his true self, as Victor the Vicious, the pres. was out to get those 32 cents; even if he had to smash the T.C.U. to accomplish this hideous deed. Slipping out the back door he climbed aboard his favorite mount, Community; called his side kick a lop eared basset hound and together they raced off into the night. Racing to the meeting place with the members of his gang, his heart pounded with the anticipation of the coming evil deed. As he reined in Community and greeted the gang, dark clouds suddenly swept across the face of the moon and darkness enveloped the countryside.

Meanwhile back at the T.C.U. Pete had completed the final stages of his work and was starting to relax. It had been a tough day for Pete; he had been open for three hours, and after all that required 10 hours of preparation and 10 hours of follow up (I know this to be true because his contract says so) and it isn't easy to do 26 hours of work in one day. The golden moon which had so pleasantly cast light upon our tired, old manager disappeared. In Pete's veins one could hear the tinkle of ice for he knew that Victor the Vicious was once again on the prowl. Was the T.C.U. the target for tonight? Pete whispered, "Mike, Mike," knowing all too well that the sheriff had gone to the Capitol. Without the assistance of the "Golden Greek: he knew that he would be at the mercy of the ruthless outlaws. Unbeknownst to all concerned, Googly Goo was soaring on the wings of a soft melody to Pete's defense. At the same moment Victor and his nasty band, making like the Light Brigade, were charging into the valley. Sliding to a halt at the pink feet of the Credit Union, they slid off their mounts, drew their weapons and made ready for their assault on old Pete and his T.C. Union.

Wait. Is that a clippity clop we hear coming into town? Fear tugged at the hearts of the gang, and those awesome words did it again. The gang froze..., "Awake, Stovey, awake." Googly Goo was here, once again to thwart the nefarious deeds of the evil. Meekly they walked to the sheriff's office and incarcerated themselves.

Oh, but not Victor the Vicious; he was of a different breed, a snarl upon his lips he slithered into the shadows. Victor knew his only chance was to bushwack Googly.

Googly vaulted from his mount, raced up the pink legs, over the blue dots and crashed through the door; seeing old Pete unharmed, Googly roared out into the street. Slowly his keen eyes searched the shadows for the movement he knew was there. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a quiver in the shadows; whipping out his pistol he advanced on the quiver.

Slowly step by step he advanced on his enemy. Suddenly, with a snarl, a huge black and white furry fury dashed into the alley; it was only the stable cat. The diversion gave Vicious time to slither over the corral. Crawling to a vantage point, Vicious was careful to avoid obstacles left in his way by the horses. Googly, undaunted by the darkness, pressed forward. Victor placed his hand on a fresh obstacle and let out an "Ooh." Googly whirled about and pinned Vicious to the ground.

Vicious, knowing this was it, surrendered. And so it was as it was written in biblical times, "A babe in arms shall deliver you." Googly Goo's mission was over, and to the soft background of "Que, Serra Serra" could be heard, "Asleep, Stovey, Asleep."



# We

Ah,  
The clock strikes bedtime.  
We saunter nonchalantly  
into the bedroom.  
He winds and sets the clock  
while I turn down the  
Bed.  
Lights out,  
sounds of muffled  
undressing,  
then the centuries old bed  
creaks beneath our  
weight.  
Alone together at last,  
he reaches for me  
in the dark night.  
We feel ourselves  
polishing our skins with  
the oils from our hands.  
We kiss and kiss and kiss  
And the love light smoulders  
and bursts into flame.  
He climbs onto me  
into me  
and our barrier of flesh  
is breached  
His skin becomes  
my skin...  
His breath and organs  
pulse and breathe  
in a living current  
with my own.  
Slowly, oh so slowly  
and gently  
We make love.  
We are one.  
We soar in the agony  
of ecstasy.  
His body speaks inside  
my brain;  
he is inside my skin  
a grown man implanted  
in my womb--  
And when we cry out  
in the final  
explosion  
the sound of it  
reverberates  
through my  
soul.

Lynne Deeds

# Death of a Quiet Revolutionary

## PREFACE:

Even before I finished this play, I was under "attack" by people close to me, so now I will explain. This play is the story of the incarceration and execution of the historical Christ. In preparation, I studied the Gospels and various writings by people of the time period. From these studies, I drew up biographies of each of the major persons involved to obtain an insight into their psyche so that I could ascertain the motives for their actions. The motives described in the play, however, are not mere flights of fancy in my sordid imagination, but valid theories put forth by reputable historical scholars. Because I was concerned with purely human motives, I have ignored much of the character known as Jesus of Nazareth; I hope that the audience will not let any religious-based bias in favor of the Gospel interfere with the drama of this story. Indeed, this play should not be looked upon as any kind of refutation of the biblical account, but rather as a supplement to one's understanding of it. The historical story is a setting for that mystical gem which is in itself quite tough and enduring. All dialogue is in colloquial terms in order to enhance the illusion of participation.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHARACTERS:

PONTIUS PILATE: Military governor of Judea. A vain, brusque, uncultured soldier with little political savvy.

CLAUDIA PROCURA: Pilate's wife. The illegitimate daughter of Claudia, the wife of Tiberius Caesar.

JESUS OF NAZARETH: Prophet from Nazareth. Leader of a "new order" of Judaism. An expert on human nature, who unnerves people with his revealing parables.

CAIAPHAS: The high priest of the Sanhedrin, which is the governing council on religious as well as local affairs. He was placed in the position by Rome.

ANNAS: Father-in-law to Caiaphas and also a member of the Sanhedrin.

HEROD ANTIPAS: Ruler of all of Galilee. Son of Herod the Great, the previous ruler of all of Palestine. Brother to Herod Archelaus, the deposed, first ruler of Judea before Pilate. He vehemently contested his father's will and he has always wanted Judea, and he wants it now.

HERODIAS: Wife of Herod Antipas. She was responsible for the death of John the Baptist.

JUDAS ISCARIOT: Member of the original twelve apostles. He is a patriotic Judean who fears Jesus' new philosophy.

FOUR OFFICERS: Soldiers who are officers under Pilate.

FOUR GUARDS: Regular Roman soldiers.

MOB: Assorted people from the populace of Jerusalem who aren't preparing at the moment for the passover.

SERVANT TO CAIAPHAS:

SCENE I : The high priest's house. There are three walls suggested; one facing the audience, and two juxtaposed to it. The wall on the left is merely the frame of one, which people can readily see through. It has a door frame in the middle of it. The other two walls are quite solid and painted to suggest stone. The wall on the right has an open doorway through it. All other locations are redresses of this basic set. There is a long table to the right, running lengthwise from upstage to downstage. This is used to form the elevated stage in SCENE VI. There is a tablecloth over it, and Caiaphas and Annas sit on either side of it, downstage. They drink wine from a large metal pitcher in metal wine goblets. There is a Menorah on the table and a large Star of David hung from the rear wall, which, when reversed, shows the imperial seal of Rome. A throne is under the Star of David. It is an arm-chair covered with a white sheet for Caiaphas, red for Pilate, and green for Herod in their respective scenes. The lighting is apparently artificial, for it is night.

CAIAPHAS: And so, two days before the feast, and nothing has been done about the Nazarene.

ANNAS: Yes, undoubtedly he will be in the city the day after tomorrow, spreading his sedition. His followers proclaim him to be the messiah - BAH! He doesn't even observe dietary law - he eats with tax collectors and harlots!"

CAIAPHAS: He is indeed a dangerous subversive. Not only does he mock all that is holy, but his very campaign is the means of Judea's destruction. Those militant zealots have long clamored for a Messiah to lead them into battle. This carpenter's son may be the impetus for Rome to annihilate us! (He takes a long draught of wine.) If only he were at my disposal, I would silence him for good.

ANNAS: They say he is in Bethany this very moment, amid the low-life formulating his strategy.

CAIAPHAS: Talk of his "miracles" spreads from here to Galilee...I fear that this sorcerer means to replace us as a new religious leader.

ANNAS: Such sacrilege is incomprehensible!

(A servant enters the room and addresses Caiaphas)

SERVANT: Forgive me for disturbing you, master, but there is a young man outside who desperately wants to speak with you.

CAIAPHAS: (annoyed) I am busy. What is so important that I should be disturbed at such an hour?

SERVANT (Humbly) He says that he brings information about a certain prophet from Nazareth.

(There is a pregnant pause as Caiaphas registers surprise at the irony of it. He glances at Annas and then back at the servant.)

CAIAPHAS: Fetch him immediately.

SERVANT: Yes, your holiness.

(The servant exits through the open doorway and re-enters with Judas Iscariot. He then again exits with the tray containing the wine pitcher and goblets. Judas is extremely upset about something.)



CAIAPHAS: Who is this with news of Jesus of Nazareth?

JUDAS: Rabbi, my name is Judas. I am...or was, a compatriot of that man.

ANNAS: (Pause) Why do you come to us this evening?

JUDAS: I know his location and can deliver him unto you.

(Both Caiaphas and Annas have stood and they move to either side of Judas.)

CAIAPHAS: What I cannot understand is why one of his confederates would come to us with such information.

JUDAS: He is at the outskirts of town awaiting.

CAIAPHAS: You didn't answer my question.

JUDAS: I cannot let them continue any longer -- I fear how things are developing.

ANNAS: (Pause) Go on.

JUDAS: He has been teaching us to do things that I fear are contrary to Judean law.

CAIAPHAS: (Pause) Then you are a Judean?

JUDAS: Yes, from Kerioth..., and I know that they hate me for it!

CAIAPHAS: Your compatriots?

JUDAS: Yes, they're all Galileans@ Until recently, I was treasurer, but for the past few days, they have accused me of coveting the money for my own use!

ANNAS: Is it justifiable?

JUDAS: Of course not!

CAIAPHAS: Of course, my friend. You have proven your integrity to me.

(He takes a purse from within his robe and jingles it.

You also appear to be a very patriotic and God-fearing young man. Isn't that right, Annas?

ANNAS: Yes, I stand corrected.

CAIAPHAS: (As he clasps the purse in Judas' hands) ...And as a patriotic Judean, you will tell us where this blasphemer is, eh?

JUDAS: (Grimacing) I don't want blood money.

CAIAPHAS: This isn't blood money. It's just money that you can use in your charity work. Now, if you don't need it...

JUDAS (Pause, clutching at it) NO...no, I can use it.

ANNAS: Where, then, can we find him?

JUDAS: (Pause) Meet me at eleven o'clock outside the garden of Gethsemane

CAIAPHAS: My son, you have made the right decision.

(Judas just looks at him and then bows his head, turns, and exits.)

CAIAPHAS: If he is there, then we must act quickly.

ANNAS: I agree..., it would be disastrous to arrest him in the crowds during the feast.

CAIAPHAS: Yes, it would cause mass rioting, and that we do not need.

ANNAS: Then you plan to assemble the Sanhedrin?

CAIAPHAS: Yes, but we will be hard-pressed. The Sanhedrin cannot try a man for his life during the feast. Moreover, we cannot trust Pilate to rush through the execution under such conditions. (He pauses and thinks) I will go immediately and speak to him. You assemble the Sanhedrin.

ANNAS: Everyone?

CAIAPHAS: (Pause) No...don't tell Nicodemus of the meeting. He is sympathetic towards the man, and I want no obstacles.... We will also need witnesses.

ANNAS: It will be done. Will we need an army?

CAIAPHAS: For what?

ANNAS: In case he uses his sorcery against us.

CAIAPHAS: I hope not. In any case, I will ask Pilate for an armed guard.

ANNAS: Good luck.

(They both exit.)

SCENE II: The private apartment of Pontius Pilate. The stage is dark. Center-stage, there is a curtained partition facing the audience and illuminated by a dimmed spotlight. In front of it is a bench that is angled towards the audience. On it, sit Pilate and Claudia. They face towards stage-left. In that direction, there is a low-angled light, flicking red and orange light back at them, giving the impression of the light from a fireplace. A Roman centurion enters into the spotlight, with Caiaphas.

CENTURION: Excuse me, Governor, but the high priest is here to speak with you. (The centurion exits.)

PILATE: Caiaphas, what brings you here at such a late hour?

CAIAPHAS: A most serious situation that requires your attention.

PILATE: Wife, please go into the bed chambers....(She exits.) What is this urgent need for consultation?

CAIAPHAS: Just tonight, we have learned the location of an important political offender.

PILATE: So..., what is the problem?

CAIAPHAS: The man's crimes are so terrible that they require the extreme penalty.

PILATE: What is the man's name?

CAIAPHAS: They call him Messiah, although he is commonly known by the name of Jesus; the son of a carpenter.

PILATE: I have heard of him, but I was under the impression that he was quite harmless.

CAIAPHAS: He is guilty of the most blasphemous sedition. Judean law demands the death penalty.

PILATE: Then, what is the problem?

CAIAPHAS: The feast is nearly upon us. If we allow this subversive to roam freely, he will surely arouse the crowds to riot...; and once the feast begins, it would be highly improper to try any man for his life.

PILATE: Then, what is it you want me to do?

CAIAPHAS: We will arrest and try him tonight. In order to finalize it tomorrow before the feast begins, you must ratify our decision and carry out the sentence before the sun has set. Is it agreeable to you?

PILATE: Whatever you wish. Is there anything else?

CAIAPHAS: Yes, we desire an armed guard to accompany us when we make the arrest...; we expect trouble.

PILATE: Ha! From that bunch? Very well, you've got it. Just tell the centurion outside to get you what you need.

CAIAPHAS: I thank you, Governor Pilate. I'm sure that Caesar will appreciate the co-operation between our governments.

PILATE: Quite..., good evening, High Priest.

(Caiaphas exits and Claudia reappears from behind the partition.)

CLAUDIA: Husband, what is going on that the High Priest requires your consultation at such an hour?

PILATE: They need to rush through the trial of a rabble-rouser before their feast and and they want my cooperation. Cooperation? Your father, the emperor, demands that I bow down to barbarians, or forfeit my position!

CLAUDIA: He was quite angry about that last incident...; you haven't had much luck here.

PILATE: I do not understand these Jews! They said that they wanted an aqueduct to bring fresh water into the city. I saw nothing wrong with using temple funds, since I had appropriated the funds to begin with! They turned Tiberius against me, so that I have to consider every move that I make! Do you know what happened to the first ruler of Judea?

CLAUDIA: No, what?

PILATE: He was exiled to Gaul, for stirring up the people..., and he was heir to the position!



CLAUDIA: (trying to change the subject) This man that they mean to arrest, what is his name?

PILATE: His is a soothsayer by the name of Jesus.

CLAUDIA: (With alarm) Have nothing to do with that righteous man; for I've suffered the entire day because of a dream of him!

PILATE: What is this dream you speak of?

CLAUDIA: I dreamt that you had associated with that man and were cursed for it! Oh husband! I know now that my dream was an omen from the Gods that this man is innocent! Please do not become involved in his trial!

PILATE: (Concerned) I gave my word to the High Priest. (He pauses to think for a moment.) Do not fear, woman. Tomorrow, I will intimate to Caiaphas that I intend to stretch the trial on longer; he will probably then decide to handle it himself.

CLAUDIA: I hope so.

PILATE: Let us retire..., tomorrow will be a long day.

SCENE III: The Herodian palace in Jerusalem. Subdued lighting suggests dawn. The set is the same essentially as in SCENE I. The only difference is that the Star of David is exchanged for the imperial sign of Rome, the Menorah is gone, and the throne has a red covering. Pilate is walking back and forth nervously. Two guards enter through the open doorway with the prisoner Jesus and throw him down at Pilate's feet. Pilate looks him over and goes through the open doorway to talk to Caiaphas and Annas who wait outside, illuminated by a lone spotlight.

PILATE: Aren't you coming in?

CAIAPHAS: No, it would be improper for priests such as ourselves.

PILATE: And so, do you have an indictment drawn up against this man?

CAIAPHAS: (Taken aback) If this man were not an evil-doer, we wouldn't be delivering him to you.

PILATE: If you won't honor Roman law, then judge him yourselves according to your own law.

ANNAS: You know that it's illegal for us to put any man to death!

CAIAPHAS: (Improvising) We've found this man guilty of terrible subversion. He forbids his followers to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is the Messiah--a king!

(Pilate, himself, is now taken aback. He turns away from the two holy men and walks irritably back to Jesus. Towering over him, he questions him.)

PILATE: Prophet...are you the king of the Jews?

JESUS: (With complete honesty) Yes, I am .

(The reply astounds Pilate. Caiaphas breaks the silence.)

CAIAPHAS: See! He doesn't even deny it!

PILATE: Man, I think you have misunderstood the impact of your statement. These men bring very serious charges against you. Have you no evidence in your behalf?

(Jesus is silent.)

CAIAPHAS: The man has been subverting loyalties from here to Galilee!

(Pilate has been studying the silent Jesus, but reacts to the word Galilee.)

PILATE: Do you mean to say that this man is from Galilee?

CAIAPHAS: Yes, what of it?

PILATE: You gentlemen have made a serious mistake! This case is out of my jurisdiction. Herod tries all Galileans! Guards, take him to Herod.

(The guards remove the prisoner, leaving a relieved Pilate.)

SCENE IV: The Herodian palace in Galilee. The set is the same as in the last scene, except that the Roman seal is gone and the covering over the throne is now green. Herod sits upon the throne with Herodias, his wife, at his side. A guard enters followed by Caiaphas and Annas, who are in turn followed by the two guards who drag Jesus along in chains. Herod is not surprised, for obviously they have been announced.

CAIAPHAS: Sire, we bring you a serious political criminal from Judea. The Governor there sent us to you, as the man comes from Galilee.

HEROD: What is his name and what has he done?

CAIAPHAS: He is guilty of subversion and blasphemy. His name is Jesus, and he comes from the town of Nazareth.

HEROD: No need to say anymore! Prophet, your fame precedes you! It appears that Pilate has honored us indeed! (He gets up and walks around Jesus, eyeing him.) You must show us some of your miracles; it is the only acceptable defense! Guards! bring our guest proper clothing. (He motions to a purple robe lying on the table, stage-right. The guards get it and put it on Jesus.) Yes!...much more becoming a conjuror! Now, entertain us with your magic! So quiet! The Baptist was never at a loss for words!

(Jesus stands still and quietly, with head bowed.)

HEROD: (Now bored) The man has apparently lost his tongue. (Pause) I find him harmless, take him back to Pilate for trial.

CAIAPHAS: (Sigh) Very well.

(The soldiers, Jesus, and the priests exit. Herodias turns to her husband.)

HERODIAS: If you found him harmless, why did you send him back to Pilate?

HEROD: While the man himself is no threat, he is quite controversial. I am curious to see how my clumsy counterpart in Judea handles the case. My brother immersed himself in controversy also, and now he is in Gaul. I may come to see control of Judea yet.

(Herodias looks at him knowingly.)

CENE V: The set is the same as it was in scene III, i.e., the Herodian palace in Jerusalem. Pilate and four officers and the centurion from Scene III are making plans for the traditional release of a prisoner that afternoon. He is disturbed as the two guards enter with Jesus. The officers leave, while the centurion stays at Pilate's side. Caiaphas and Annas, as before, stay outside.

PILATE: Caiaphas! What is the meaning of this? Didn't you take the prisoner to Herod?

CAIAPHAS: The tetrach of Galilee sends him back to you.

PILATE: I was just in the midst of picking which prisoners to present to the people. (Pause) He (motions to Jesus) will be among them.

CAIAPHAS: But...

PILATE: Priest, that is my decision!

(Caiaphas and Annas leave. Pilate turns to the guards holding Jesus.)

PILATE: Lock him up along with the others.

(The guards exit with Jesus. Pilate talks confidentially with the centurion.)

PILATE: I am in quite a dilemma. I must grant the Sanhedrin's wishes, but I find it impossible, personally and politically, to execute the man. (Pause) Centurion! get me fifty trustworthy men and place them in the crowds in civilian clothing. When I present the prisoners, they will call for the release of Barabbas, the Zealot. It shouldn't be hard to sway the crowd, the zealot is quite popular.

CENTURION: How much should I give them?

PILATE: The same as before, only hurry!

(The centurion exits, leaving an anxious Pilate)

CENE VI: The courtyard outside the Herodian palace in Jerusalem. The set is the same as the previous scene. What was the table is now drawn over to center-stage where it goes lengthwise from left-stage to right-stage. It is now a stage. On the center of it sits the throne, with Pilate in it. To the right of him are four guards holding Jesus and Barabbas. To the left of him are Caiaphas and Annas. There are extras to the left and right of the platform, on the stage proper, who make up the crowds. The sounds of the mob are heard over everything. Pilate stands and addresses the mob.

PILATE: People of Judea, as is customary during festival time, I, your Governor, will release one prisoner of your choosing, to show the benevolence of Rome! (He pauses as they cheer.) I give you two men, both accused of committing political crimes! This one (he motions to Jesus) is accused of subversion! This one (he motions to Barabbas) was caught participating in a riot in this city! I give you the choice...; which man do you want released? (The hired men shout for Barabbas. They are echoed by the mob's shouts)

MOB: GIVE US BARABBAS!



PILATE: Very well! (He motions to the centurion, who comes from somewhere in the back with a water basin and towel.) I give you this man...to do with as you wish! (He washes his hands in the basin and dries them on the towel.) I wash my hands of all responsibility! His fate is in your hands!

(The guards start to lead Jesus away, but Pilate stops them.)

PILATE: Wait! (He writes something on a piece of parchment that the centurion hands him, after putting down the wash basin. He gives it to one of the guards. Caiaphas and Annas run over to read it.) Put this above him on the cross.

CAIAPHAS: Pilate! This is an outrage! This proclaims him to be "King of the Jews"!

PILATE: (Sneering and triumphant) Priest, what I have written, I have written!

(Pilate then stalks off stage leaving the shocked Caiaphas and Annas, while the guards drag Jesus off stage in the opposite direction.)

CURTAIN

John Zygilewicz

## Deaf Mutes

Music blared from the bus radio. No one listened. Miscellaneous voices droned on aimlessly. No one voice listened or gave recognition to another. A newscast boomed and replaced the music. A few people heard it, but no one listened to it.

Daniel Ryan never experienced blaring music or miscellaneous voices. Physically, deaf-mutes don't drone and they don't hear, but they can listen. Daniel listened with his eyes. They were blue, very deep, attentive, and alert. They listened and knew the change in seasons, not by whistling winds or crunching leaves, but by the turning hues. More importantly, they listened to the change in emotions. His eyes didn't need to hear sobbing to know sorrow. The change from a grin to a grimace and eyes clouded over, sufficed. The blue depths didn't hear the motor grind, but they did listen to the empty faces belonging to the droning voices. Theirs was an emptiness that mirrored the soul.

The bus reached its final stop. Daniel reached his destination, a new life alone, and independence of Evansdale, the institution of learning that he came from. He uncurled from his seat and departed off the bus.

The fading sun caused an upswell in motion. People hurried to reach home before dusk. Children, parents, old ladies, and everyone else surged around the luggage like a high tide. The flow of bodies rushed swiftly forward, and then slowly, little by little they ebbed back and away. Only a few others and Daniel were left by the tied to gether their belongings.

He had already memorized the directions to the Stone's boarding house, where he would live. With a leather satchel tucked under his arm, he picked up his suitcase and lugged it off down the street. He had to walk a little way through the center of town. Daniel could sense the sideways glances and full-faced glares. People always stare at strangers. They would start with his luggage, looking at it as if it were some evil bag of tricks. Then they would work up his body, but they would turn and cower when they reached his eyes, not wanting to communicate with him. They knew, instinctively, that the blue depths could listen right through them.

He turned left onto a street that had been deserted by people. Walking a few more blocks, he reached the Stone's boarding house. Daniel had no trouble finding this house, his new home. It stood in a crabgrass yard, alone, constructed barrenly of brick and mortar. A narrow porch stuck to the brick like a wart, vainly attempting to conceal the building's nakedness. Daniel sighed and swallowed hard. Could the inside of this house support life, or would the marrow be as malignant as the outer bone?

The front door opened briskly and a matronly woman blew out. She turned angrily towards the door and slammed it shut with a deliberate and forced shove, leaving it to bang and clang against the door frame.

Daniel approached the pacing windstorm cautiously. As he moved forward he noticed that her body drooped; a little closer and he saw the sagging muscles jostle and jump with her agitated motion; inching closer still, he saw the veins in her neck tighten and stand out red and angry against her flushed skin. Daniel's eyes caught every angry movement. In his mind, he could even hear her heart pumping furiously.

He had climbed the stairs and was standing on the porch before she noticed him. Startled, she slid back into the shadow of the house. Daniel just stood and smiled uncomfortably. Finally, mustering some courage she drew her body into a straight line, pulling her sagging muscles into some kind of order and stepped into the light.

"What do you want?" she asked before she saw Daniel's luggage. "You want a room?"

It hadn't occurred to Daniel that she wouldn't know who he was. He took out a crisp white card and handed it to her. Her eyes moved along its surface quickly. "My name is Daniel Ryan. I am a deaf mute. Please look at me when you speak, so that I can listen to and understand you."

Mrs. Stone's chest deflated with relief and the suspicious glassiness escaped from her eyes.

"You gave me quite a start Mr. Ryan, but never mind. Come in, we've been expecting you."

Daniel's room was on the second floor, and had two windows. Looking out of them he saw the back yard crabgrass. He also saw that dusk had advanced over most of the city. Now it had reached him, forcing the last rays of sunlight to retreat from his windows.

"You're lucky, Mr. Ryan. This room is the best in the house. I've often wondered why this room was so much sunnier than the others." She shrugged her shoulders and forgot the sun. "By the time you're done unpacking, dinner should be ready. You can meet the other tenants then...and my husband. Lucky you," she mumbled as an afterthought.

The inside of the house wasn't much better than the outside. Margaret Stone had tried to give the place life by hanging a portrait here, a still life there, but the physical decorations could not hide the tense atmosphere, or fill the empty void that was in the house and the people within it.

Daniel walked hesitatingly into the dining room. The six other tenants and Mr. Stone had already started dinner. The six looked him over curiously. They had never seen a deaf-mute before. Mr. Stone just ignored him.

"Please sit down Mr. Ryan."

Mrs. Stone had brought in another plate of the conglomeration supper and motioned where she wanted Daniel to sit. When he moved closer to the table, the six twitched and scowled worriedly, expecting Daniel to break into a frenzied dance or some other freakish fit. He stopped and smiled at them, trying to tell them to relax and enjoy life. He certainly wouldn't hurt them. All of them avoided his eyes. They didn't want to listen.

The supper wasn't as bad as it looked. Daniel chewed slowly, breathing deeply between each bite, relaxing despite his dinner companions. Three had excused themselves and gone into the parlor to play cards. Not wanting to lose the rest of the audience, Mr. Stone tapped Daniel on the shoulder.

"Enjoying your supper, Mr. Ryan?" he asked, puffing on his cigar.

Daniel nodded yes, but wasn't fooled by Mr. Stone's pretense of friendliness. The man's mouth was drawn into a smirk. He took another long puff from his cigar and winked at the three other tenants.

"So tell me, what are you going to do for a living? Sell key chains?"

He grinned with self-satisfaction while the tenants stifled their amusement. All they heard was the man of the house making a little joke. They hadn't bothered to listen to the deep cuttingness of the remark.

Daniel ignored the man's little joke and scratched a reply on the pad that he carried with him and handed it to Mr. Stone.

"Oh, so you're going to be working in an office. Hey, would you say that in sign language? You know, show us how it works."

Daniel obliged, sending Mr. Stone into hysterics, with the other three following his cue. At first Daniel felt hurt, but he became more and more amused as he watched the merry little herd reveal their teeth. They reminded him of a family of baboons he had seen at the zoo. The father would flash his ivories to impress mom and the kids, and they would reciprocate. Daniel smiled along with obvious amusement, spoiling all their fun. Now they felt ashamed and humiliated all at once. Daniel finished eating and then went to his room.

Lying down on his bed, he reminisced over old times, his friends, and trips to the beach. He could see the waves lapping the shore, growing bigger and stronger with the afternoon. They would grow so strong and vibrant that they would carry part of the beach back into the sea. The sun made everything slow and lazy. Daniel's eyes closed a little with each wave, until he was completely hypnotized and peacefully sleeping.

The sun filtered in through the windows, slowly flooding Daniel's room with warmth and the morning. He awoke slowly, not quite remembering where he was till he looked out of his window. The crabgrass brought him back to time and place quickly. The time was Sunday, and the place was Stone's boarding house.

Dressed in a grey suit, he left for church with the Stones. Daniel had always thought that buildings took on the personality of their city. St. Mary's was fairly large and was probably once very attractive, but now it was badly decaying. The stenciled designs on the columns were worn away and disjointed, and the walls above the heating vents were the sources of the dirt which was spreading and creeping over the entire building. Even the baptismal had grown dusty from idleness.







Mass started. Only half of the church was filled. Those who were there twitched and fidgeted. Children daydreamed or carved their names into the seat in front of them. Two women giggled and laughed because their best friend's slip was showing. Most everyone else dozed off. Daniel couldn't hear the voices drone and crank out another response, but he could see that no one was listening. It was like being in the midst of programmed robots.

The remaining day wasn't any better. Each hour lingered and stuck like molasses letting that ugly warted house flood with emptiness. The emptiness of a man who hurled obscenities at his wife, while she hurled fragile glass figurines at him, neither one stopping to listen for the other's cries. They growled and roared. Each one revealed his fangs as he circled around for the final kill. It was Daniel in a lion's den.

Six other people closed their ears and eyes to each other's needs. They sat and played checkers, they played cards, and they played at life. None of them ever got a winning hand.

The day finally lost its grip, and allowed the dark to blanket the remains. All night, Daniel tossed and turned in a half sleep. Awakening early, he shook off his nightmares.

The morning air was crisp and shocking. Still tense from the day before, Daniel strode hurriedly to the bus terminal, his leather satchel tucked under his arm, and his suitcase held firmly in his other hand. The cool air rushed into his lungs, swelling them with labored breathing and pain. He knew he was alive.

Daniel boarded the bus headed back towards Evansdale. The faces were still blank, the voices still shunned speaking, but droned on in idle chatter. The radio blared, but no one listened.

Paula Pitkiewicz



# The Dawn

A fire blazed near the edge of a pine forest; it crackled softly under starry skies, sending tendrils of wispy smoke towards the lumbering radiance of the full moon. People stood around the fire drinking cans of warm beer, dancing to scratchy music that blared from car radios, laughing at themselves like children playing hide-and-seek till their mothers called them in from the stormy night. Some sat further away from the leaping flames than others, sitting in the cool dirt of the clearing. But I sat the furthest away, drinking cherry vodka from a crystal clear bottle that shimmered with the flickering flames of the blaze. My back felt cold, my face faintly warmed by the prickly heat of crackling pine. The vodka was also cold, but warmed the insides. I slowly turned away.

The sandy clearing gave way to a grassy meadow as it opened up northwards. Scraggy clumps of baby elms dotted the uneven terrain of the field. I was sitting at the point where the desert-like sand turned to grass, an obscure point that shifted with the seasons. Then off in the distance I noticed an elevated plain of earth running across the grassy expanse. There were tracks on top of that oblong mound, train tracks glinting in the moonlight, waiting for the rumble of silvered wheels. I waited, but nothing. Only the sounds of muted voices falling on reddened ears that grew deafer and deafer as time tick-ticked its way to a never ending promise. Someday.

A small plane hummed through the sky, buzzing like a swarm of bees towards a forgotten lily in bloom. The fuzzy sound rocked the brain to a gentle sleep, one filled with a dreamless dream. I felt the fire on the back of my tired neck. My face was cold and stony, the grass wet from midnight dew. My boots were encrusted with the dirt that lay before the grass. I felt a storm coming on, but the moon still shone and the stars still blinked in their field of blackish blue. I looked at those winking mysteries in the sky and winked back an even greater mystery. But they'd never understand, only laugh and laugh and laugh until I couldn't take it anymore. They didn't know any better, though--or did they? A breeze whipped across the meadow, ruffling the feather in my brown felt hat. It was the one I wore to all parties, an image...But it didn't work, only kept the top of my head warm.

I heard a car rumbling down the cart road that weaved through the pines. Brilliant headlights streamed across the clearing and bore into the night as the old Chevy roared into view. It parked with the other cars at the end of a growing semi-circle on the far side of the bonfire. Two couples go out and lost themselves in the expanding ramble of the crowd. Maybe I should be a little more sociable, maybe not. If only, only...

"What are ya doin' sitting here?" She had crept up on me like a cat stalking its prey. No great wonder.

"Just sitting in the grass drinking some vodka. Want some?" I asked.

"No...it makes me sick. I'll stick to beer."

"Oh..." Neither of us spoke for a few moments. I just kept looking out across the heavens. Jill was a strong girl, full of fun and memories that seared the mind. She was blond, green-eyed, soft and radiant; she was a floater that drifted among the crowd like a stray kitten looking for scraps of food. And if the garbage cans were empty or tightly closed, she'd move on to more attractive prospects. Also, like a cat, she had hidden claws that could dig and wound the flesh. At first she spoke softly...

"Why don't you come over to the fire?"

"W-why should I?" I replied stupidly, as if something had stuck in my throat.

"Because, we're supposed to be together tonight. That's why!"

"Really..."

"Yeah, really!" I could see that her fur was getting ruffled.

"Why can't we be together here?" I asked simply. She paused a moment, trying to control the situation.

"What's been bothering you lately? You just don't seem to be a part of us anymore. What's gotten into you?" she said.

"Nothing but drink, nothing but drink," I echoed.

"Come on, let's go," she said weakly.

"No..."

"Suit yourself," she chided angrily, "I'll just have to find somebody else!"

"Yeah, somebody," I said. She stormed off towards the blaze; I turned and watched her shapely form and floppy hat disappear into the hazy glow of the fire. They all wore hats. She'd be better off anyway. Nothing like loyalty...

The music continued to blare; people nodded off on blankets, others grew crazy from the effects of alcohol. Madmen leaped over the wild flames, some standing on the roofs of cars shouting into nothingness at the top of their lungs, others driving their cars into the pines, honking their horns and flashing their headlights into a greater stillness. Disruption was their game and fear was the thing they feared. "Ha...themselves."

Cold set in my bones; the air muffled the noise and sang a song all its own--the song of stillness, emptiness of space. I tilted the bottle again and again, growing deafer in the roar, growing bitter like the dust. A storm brewed within an ocean of sparking green; spring tides twisted and pulled at the very fibers of my brain. The stars were the answers, so far away, so real as to only be touched in a dream. And the incandescent moonglow, the calling of mystery, the flight of wingless eagles on currents of windless sky--all, all so real. Deep azure, azure like the blue of my eyes. Crackle of pine, smell of sandy earth, flickering shadows and the buzzing of a thousand ants who crawled their way to an underground existence of grainy earth. Walking, talking people--saying nothing--spilling their guts only to have them mopped off the face of the world by tidy little souls so cleansed by their own anemic brilliance. Thoughts. Mood. Hazy people in a hazy land...

More, more, more. I wanted more for a thirsting spirit. But it was gone...as all things must. All that remained was the spit of a man-child, a bottle of dream for a bottle of spit. The meadow and the desert grew vague; my head hung buzzing into an increasing stillness.

Cars slowly coughed into life; lights clicked on and quietly disappeared down a pebbled road into the darker moments of a morning. Voices faded, embers flickered then grew dull. Stillness, stillness, quiet reigned supreme.

I fell over on my side, my reeling head crashing to the cool earth. I listened to the sluggish beat of my heart, the crunch of sand, footsteps. I listened, listened, listened...

"Will he be okay?"

"Yeah, don't worry about him."

"Shouldn't we cover him up though?"

"Naw, he ain't feelin' no pain anyway. I'd sure hate to be in his place when he wakes up in the morning, though."

"Me too. What's eatin' him anyway?"

"Who knows, come on, let's go." A car door opened in the dead of night; an engine pounded into life and idled a few brief moments, hovering as if undecided. The moon was growing weaker now, the sun wasn't too far off. The car scrubbed out in the dirt and headed into the whispering forest, its horn honking into oblivion.

All was still now, just the gentle heaving of my lungs, the beat of a weakened heart, the murmur of an ageless wind. Then something else, barely perceptible at first, but then stronger as it drew near. A train moaned and rumbled across the golden tracks that lay in the distance, crying its mystery with the voice of the universe. Calling for me, screeching in my wooden ears like a hoot owl lost in the woodland. It faded fast into eternity; I faded fast. Faster, faster, faster with the dying song...

The sun is what woke me--stirred me into life. The ground was damp from the dew; my flaring nostrils were filled with the smell of earth. Slowly I became more aware of my surroundings. My wasted head still hummed with the liquid fever of an artificial madness. I lay in the grassy dirt with my back to the warming sun; I felt its gentle heat on the nape of my neck. I grew stronger inside, gaining a new found strength in the dawning of my life. The crystal bottle from the violent night stood a few feet from my face. I collected myself, then staggered to my feet, reaching for the light. The dawn unfolded before me; the sun rose higher above the misty land making the sky pink, then blue like the oceans. All was still. Then a crow screeched in the sky, flapping its way to a new destiny, cawing in the quiescence of a breaking day. The black thing circled lazily on invisible currents, then flew off towards the growing sun.

The quiet engulfed me once again and a great sickness suddenly came to a head. I puked my guts on the dust of civilization; it puddled, then soaked into the sandy earth. A copper taste

remained in my cotton mouth. I gasped a few times but did it without regret, for just then I knew that it was over and I had places to go and things to see. I no longer feared myself and took a step in the right direction, but first I walked over to where my bottle lay and picked it up. I gazed into its emptiness for a few moments, then threw it with all my might into the blackened pit that was once a flaming joy. It shattered into a thousand silvers.

I turned and began to walk as fast as I could towards the rising sun, towards the gleaming tracks that called my name. Suddenly I realized that I was missing something; I reached for my brown felt hat, but it was gone, lost forever. The wind must have carried it off during the night. But it made no difference, none at all, and I began to run and run through the grassy stillness of the meadow...singing.

Scott E. Roth



## In the Middle of the County

In the middle of the county there's a town. In the middle of the town there's a farmhouse with all that it owns: cornfields, a stream, a clump of trees. In the middle of summer there's July and the sun, and sweat, so in the middle of the clump of trees there's a boy soaking in their breezes.

The ground underneath the trees is soft and springy and makes a comfortable refuge for Jason Caine lying on his back, looking skyward. Rays of light break through the holes in the green canopy hitting the ground and Jason. He blinks now, he blinks then and pulls himself upright. The birds flying out of his reach teased him with their song. He reaches for his worn guitar lying beside him and lets a few notes float upward to mingle with the birds.

"Jason! Jason! What the hell are you doing?"

"Just practicing my guitar, Pop."

Pop spits on the ground. "Practicing," he mutters. "Get over here and help me with this lumber."

Jason steps out from the shade of the trees. For a moment the piercing light blinds him. He has to close his eyes. The earth not protected by the trees is cracked and hard. Only a few blades of grass are strong enough to push up here and there.

"Put that damn thing down," his Pop sputters, "and pick up that lumber."

He leans his guitar against one of the trees and then walks toward the lumber pile. Before he picks up one of the rough boards he glances back to his guitar. It's safe.

"Well, come on. Help me load this lumber on the truck."

"Coming."

"Couple of hours of loading lumber and those fine fingers of yours will develop into a pair of man's hands, strong and rough."

Huge boards lie piled next to the cow barn. A blue pick-up covered over with dust awaits a load to carry to the east pasture.

Jason grabs one end of a board, his father grabs the other. They heave it up and slide it onto the truck. The roughness irritates Jason's hands. The texture of the heavy boards lie in sharp contrast to the smooth rosewood of his guitar.

"I've got my audition at the conservatory tomorrow, Pop."

"Stop daydreaming and load up!"

An hour passes, then two. A pair of sinewed hands swing the lumber from earth to truck. Fine fingers grasp and tug at the wood.

"Get in the pick-up. We'll bring this load out to the pasture."

"Jason slumps into the seat of the pick-up. Sweat beads trickle off his brow. The fine fingers are calloused and tired. He knows that when the truck reaches the pasture he will unload two hours and four splints worth of work.

Morning has passed into day. Day has passed into night. The hard, rough lumber has passed from earth, onto the truck, and then back again. Where an old fence once surrounded the pasture, one-fourth of a new, strong fence now stands. Rough hands are now rougher. Fine fingers no longer exist.

"You've got a pair of man's hands now son."

"Yah, sure."

Jason Caine remembers he is auditioning at the conservatory. He remembers his guitar safe under the trees and bounds out of the farmhouse to rejoin his friend. The song of a few night birds hovers overhead. The notes that Jason plucks from his guitar falter and sink. His swollen, cut fingers block the music, keeping the notes from rising. Looking downward, he sees splintered palms and remembers that the wood was too hard, the fence too long, and a man's hands too rough.

Paula Pitkiewicz

# Earth Mother

## AN EPIC BALLAD

Since the dawn of my birth,  
the birth of man  
I am the Earth Mother.  
I am fertility  
I am loving  
I am everlasting  
I am life.

In the early times I breathed life into the struggles of man.  
I gathered wild seeds and grains to mash and cook for man.  
I cured the skins man brought me.  
I laid in his cold and bitter winter's bed, and warmed his body  
with my life's blood.  
I took his body into mine as he, heaving and thrusting, planted his  
seed in my field.  
I gathered the harvest of his lustful planting and let it suckle at my breast.

Oh, I am the Earth Mother  
Sing my praises  
I am strong  
I am life.

In the infancy of time I planted and harvested and wove the plaited reeds  
to house the flesh.  
I nurtured and cherished the shining purity that is the soul.  
I am the giver of life.  
I stand by man.  
I fight the angry night beasts and evil spirits by his side.  
I tend the fire of survival and ensure the continuance of the race.

I am the Earth Mother  
the right hand of man  
I am the provider, and protector of his hopes and dreams.  
I am his temperance, his conscience, his love.  
In all these things I serve him  
For without me there would be no survival.

And time spoke its first word.  
And the word was War.  
And men in their infancy fought with hellish mien and sang the glories  
of blood.  
Man gutted and pillaged and burned  
and caused the fields to cry with spilled guts and broken bones.

And I cared for his wounds and nursed his fevers and cautioned him.  
But still he banded and fought and yearned to conquer.  
He brought me his blood-bought trophies--  
Bathed me in a shower of carnage,  
But he did not see me weeping.

And I am the Earth Mother  
Bringing forth the life so cheaply destroyed  
my sons and daughters  
annointed in blood  
Killed in folly  
Killed in war

But still I ~~am~~ the Earth Mother  
I must endure.

And when time learned to walk  
it found that all roads led to the great empire.  
And man had won his wars and assimilated his rewards and prospered greatly.  
Ships roamed the seas  
Well-formed armies marched, peace-keepers and guardians now  
And Culture flourished.

And I was the Earth Mother  
revered in beauty.  
I am the life and continuance.  
I am admired  
I am used and built upon.  
I am taken, precious jewel, man demanding, and yet  
I enfold him in my arms  
With fragrant breath and flowers in my hair and he slams his seed.

And so I am the Earth Mother  
Used in much comfort  
I am sunny and rich and smile on man.

When time began to sing and dance  
I was a Queen.  
And Kings danced on me.  
And man fought again.  
This, a holy quest, was with much glory  
And man sang my praises.  
But man, enchanted by holy power  
Worshipped me with chivalrous might,  
Planted flowers in my hair and married me in the eyes of God.  
I was pure and virgin  
and man plowed my fields and sowed his fertility and I was fruitful.

I am the Earth Mother  
I am constant  
I am life  
I am everlasting.

And when time learned to explore its sensuality  
Man began to explore unknown realms  
to push onward over the edge of the earth to new lands.  
Man settled and planted and I fought by his side and brough civilization  
to the new home.  
I was the settlement.  
I sweated with him side by side in field and prairie and sang the skies.  
And I shared his bed, and breathed patience and loving in his mouth and  
he sowed his seed and I populated the new continent.

I am the Earth Mother  
I am constant  
I bring new life



I am the future.

Now time has come to its prime

I am busily peopled

I am alive and growing

I am exploring and learning

I am radiating energy.

Man is my companion

he and I love, and we are together.

He caresses me and I him

We come together and I welcome him.

We make love in a passion heightened by understanding and respect.

I grow! I grow! I grow!

I am the Earth Mother

I am constant

I am glowing in the light of destiny

I am real

I am everlasting

I AM THE EARTH MOTHER

I AM WOMAN

Lynne Deeds

# Dream

Things. People. Songs and dreams. They quietly fade into the lazy stillness of a summer's night, humming like a swarm of bees into the gentle quiescence of twilight. My mind flutters, then draws to a close; faces are lost in the silent gloom of obscurity. Rest. The world rocks me to sleep; I fall to the heavens, to the cool twinkle of stars--the chill of space. And the moon shines, and the universe calls...Calling, roaring, flowing like a sparkling mountain stream in the rush of a winter's melted madness. Knowing, yet not telling that spring whistles through the sighing pines like a long and everlasting freight train rattling down its shimmering track like a ghost in morning mist, hauling timber for the building of more railroads across the molehills of fantasy. And it builds, flashing silvered wheels.

Silvers of sun pierce the hoary fog. Momentum. Chug-chug wispy-woo, hootin' and hawkin' down and round the bend, glinting in the brilliance of a day-star that knows no other song. Faster-down, faster-down like speeding bullets from the blur of a gun. Clackety-clack. Wackety-wack. Quicker than falling stars. Rushing, weaving, twisting with fear and cosmic thrill...Down, down, down. Screaming like an eagle's wind, faster than a falcon's dive for jack rabbits hop-hopping their ways to a dusty destiny. Building, building, building...racing the very rays of the sun for their glory. Coughing. Clanking.

Then other mountains loom like awesome giants in the west, reaching again to the very heights of a harsher mystery. Stars blink like beacons in the fading blaze; a winter's sun replaces a pale moon; the after-chill of excitement takes hold with frozen fingers that still the very heart of a man. Fantasy to dream, and dream 'till dust.

I awake to the sound of a beating heart, then drift in the softness of a bed...to dream again and again and again and again....

Scott E. Roth

(Editor's note: "Dream" is an excellent description of what S.T. Coleridge in Biographia Literaria calls the Secondary Imagination.)

# TAWG

They came from near and from afar. They were of all the races, creeds and colors the human population is represented by. They all filed down the roads and pathways to the place where the word was to be spoken. Two hundred and twenty were on foot to the place where the word was to be spoken. Everyone except the old man of knowledge. He sat on top of the mountain that sloped down into the valley in which the people drove like swarms of mad ants stricken with an urgent desire to end their existence.

The valley was the only passage in the mountains that was open for transit to those unfamiliar with the hidden trails. To the east lay the ocean and to the west of the mountains lay the interior of the great continent. It was a marvelous continent. Its green revolution was actually green. Its fingers had reached the moon and even its eyes had glimpsed the surfaces of distant planets. This great continent kept the rest of the world at bay by teetering them on the brink of starvation. And if that failed they had at their disposal weapons of war that could sear the eyes out of a man's head. But this was only secondary to the best control which was keeping their green revolutions brown. It was a continent of plenty for everyone. If one desired a thing that only a few in the society had, it was indeed within the realm of possibility for that person to get it with a little perseverance.

All would have been fine if they only had virtuous human qualities and lived by the few good rules of living. No, they had opened up Pandora's box and let all the vices of man filter into the souls of everyone. So much that even hope was helplessly hidden. Hope was just a vacant word that someone eons ago had spat on a piece of paper. They all lived like cut-throat vipers. They all reflected each other's false kindness. Their real feelings toward each other were like the fiery molten lava of the volcano, held back only by thin walls of rock. Were it not for fear they would have annihilated themselves centuries before; it was this infinitesimal precipice that kept them from exhibiting all their vices at any one time. But one thing was for certain. If the people of the great continent had their interest occupied, they seldom thought of each other. In the better days, the people would take time out for each other. In these days though, the best they could do was say a friendly hello that held about as much sincerity as a cat has for a mouse. People were courteous and listened to other people speak, but they never heard a single word. Maybe it was their fakeness. Everyone tried to be better than everyone else. They had great beauty contests, they had ceremonies where the best actors, singers, tennis players, golfers, and all the rest of the human pasttime participants were given recognition. For all the recognition was worth, there were some who would commit suicide. The newspapers would then scoff up hordes of profit if such an incident did occur. The newspapers were cruel and vicious. They played and preyed on everyone and everything. They were the worst offenders of the good rules of living. But the funny thing about it was, everyone bought the papers. Even the people who professed to be good and righteous were found cynically smiling into the black on white virus. People thrived upon the idea of justifying their little wrongs by comparing them to the bigger wrongs committed by society itself. And so it was, the little wrongs were compared and justified by the larger wrongs and the larger wrongs were in turn justified by still larger wrongs. In effect the process snowballed into gigantic proportions. Nobody cared, nor did they love, nor did they take time to learn to live life. The greatness of music, art, and poetry was ignored. The greatness of the outdoors was abandoned for the darkened back rooms where vulgarity, violence, and abusive sex on celluloid strips was shown on a pure white screen. Like all human beings, they couldn't think along two lines of thought at the same time. As a result their incredulous intelligence led them to be slaves of their own technology.

Machines, more machines and still more machines were being made. Fuel, energy, feed for the fuel makers. Viciousness reigned everywhere. People fought for fuel to feed their machines. The people were striving for just one thing, happiness. But the paradox was trying to find it in inhuman machines. Like a black cloud of locusts, they consumed all that lay in their path. Six days a week the vicious cycle would go. But then, then it became so. They question that seventh day. It was a hindrance. It stopped the cycle. Nothing, nothing must stop the cycle. It must, it must go! The fervor spread like a plague. What was it, where did it come from? Why could they not continue the cycle on that seventh day. WHY?



Well nobody really knew why. The politicians didn't know, the engineers and scientists didn't know, the historians didn't know, nobody knew why. What they did know was that it was created by what was once called the church, but that had long been abandoned by society because no one would be people of the church. Somehow there had been a loss of reason for it. Besides it was totally against the nature of the inhabitants.

Because it involved everyone's lives it was made top priority of the land. The next step was to resolve a legitimate reason for it. Everyone was in on the action. People dug out all the old manuscripts of the past, the lawmakers proposed new laws to do away with it. A lot of information as amassed on the subject of the sabbath day and now it was time to deliberate a resolution. Being a democratic society, all sides were heard. The workers wanted the sabbath moved to Monday and the management of the industries wanted the sabbath completely abolished. It was clear as to the final outcome of the vote because the majority always ruled.

The old man knew the reason for the sabbath day. He had tried many times before to make the people realize the mistakes they were making, but that was when he was young. Now he is old and just lives in the mountains to avoid death by the hands of those who would have it so. He knew it would be a mistake to change the sabbath day. He realized that some things must not have been seen in black and white before they are to be believed in.

He gathered all that was dear to his soul. He brought them to the spot where he had many times before conferred with his inner feelings. His actions were very ceremoniously executed. Not a word did he speak. Bread and wine he consumed as he watched the droves of people file through the valley to the place where the word was to be spoken. The old man could hear their cheering and yelling. Something about the air. It was calm, deathly calm.

All the people were now gathered at the great harbor on the ocean where a mammoth pair of arms cynically greeted all newcomers to the land. From this point giant speakers were directed towards the land so that all present may hear the resolution. It can be expected that two hundred and twenty million people make a lot of noise. And so it was. But above the horrendous shouting the speakers broke through.

"Attention." Silence spit its oil on all the creaky wheels.

"Due to popular demand, the sabbath day will be moved to Monday."

Before the last of the breath of the last word had left the mouth of the speaker, all was gone. The people, the mountains, the valley, the great land itself was gone. There was nothing but blackness. Everything but an old man sitting in black empty space was gone. It was his moment to realize what creation had always hungered for. It was now clear to him that in changing the sabbath, which was the final day of the creator's work in making the world, by making it Monday or the first day of the creator's work, it actually made it as if nothing was created at all. But the old man knew this all the while anyway. He knew that he had held the ultimate truth.

Steven Aldrich

# Questions

Questions make me wonder if when I die, I'll wake up and start living. A quote of mine of four years ago. Time is of such importance but so short that you have to and should magnify life to your best ability. Sounds so philosophical.

Crying on Monday made me realize I can't go on being a secret or being undecided about myself. I was homesick Monday, went home Tuesday. My mother, very much unaware of me, stood talking on the phone with an air for life and a cup of tea. I got out of the car and heard crying, like someone calling my name. I couldn't locate the source so decided it was just a flashback from good ol' LSD high school days. But then, "Mary-meo-mary."

I looked up and saw my cat on the roof; she was leaning over the edge calling to me, not in a greeting but in need of help.

"Listen, Figaro, you got up here, babe, now you can get yourself down." How many times have I cringed at that statement. I decided to help, and mapped out a route, yelling out directions how to get down. I feel very close to cats, maybe in another life, who knows.

I walked into the kitchen; the curtains were different; the old ripped, plastic table cloth had been replaced by a real one, an indication my little brothers were growing up and not spilling so much. So much had changed; but when mom kissed me, it was the same.

"Hi, thought I'd surprise you and come home; brought you a cake."

"Oh, Mary, what a surprise! I was just telling your aunt about you. Oh, you would come home now, look at this place."

"Ma, never mind the dishes, I came home to see you." We made tea and sat down. My mother produced dishes of Italian pastries.

"You know that father of yours will never change. We went to Boston Saturday and he had to go to the Italian Bakery. The place has changed, and too many of his friends have died; he doesn't want to go back, besides look at this: they cost forty-five cents apiece. That's terrible!"

"Yeah, Mom, I know, a lot of things are terrible; will you stop playing around with that stuff and drink your tea?"

I knew her needless fiddling was because of nerves. At one time I would do the dishes and clean up like a chicken without its head because I couldn't talk or was embarrassed about my emotions. It's literally taken me years of crying and trying. Today I came to talk and if I cried, so what.

"Listen Mom, I want to talk to you. I want you to understand about me."

"Mary, what do you mean, you're our daughter, ew know all about you."

"Ma, please, just drink your tea."

The next couple of hours were extremely tense. I unraveled, unveiled and stood naked and asked if she still loved me and approved. They've never said I couldn't try something; I was never scolded for grades; as far as they were concerned I can do anything. I'm bionic before my time. I made more tea.

"Are you happy with me or how can I say it; are you glad I'm into Art and planning to move to New York? I know Daddy would like me to move home and work in the bank and wear skirts. I know that, but you can only be a bank teller and even if you're the best bank teller, you're only the best at your job. I want to be the best person I can be and not work under someone's directions. Do you understand, I want to be the best person I can and to develop from my work; it's a projection of me. I'm either going to make it or break it on my own. You understand? I need to know that you want me to work on. You've never said "no" but you've never said "yes," either. Do you approve, do you believe in me, do you love me? I can't ever be the daughter you and Dave have dreamt up, but I can be me. But listen, if there's anything or any suggestions, I'll take them into consideration, but I've got to try my way first.

Crying into our cups of tea we answered all the questions that have been gnawing at me for years, have really stunted me.

We went downtown to return some pants and as we started to cross the street, I took her arm, not because I was afraid of the traffic, like when I was small, but I wanted to hold her and I felt like a giant.

Mary DiNoia



# A Wintery Song

It was afternoon; the sky was grey and threatened snow. A cool November wind swept through the town; it sent old yellowed newspapers flying down soiled streets, scudding before the gale like dusty tumbleweeds in a sandy desert. Old creaking buildings lined the main avenue. Factories hummed in the distance, their blackened chimneys rising above lifeless trees, spewing forth foul odors and billowing clouds of wispy smoke. An old man sauntered down the street, wobbling like a nervous high-wire walker in the midst of a thunderstorm. Rusted cars wished through the town, past the stores, shops and bars that forged the framework of a community.

The wintery sky turned darker as the hidden sun began to sink behind earth's back. The wind howled with a greater ferocity, kicking up the dirt of civilization into whirling clouds of dust. Then a whistle suddenly pierced the frozen air, screeching like a triumphant blue-jay on the wing. In a few moments the streets of the town were filled with people, rushing people who never talked in the bitter cold. They walked like zombies, stiff-like, with grim faces and dull, lifeless eyes. Soon the streets were deserted again, except for one man who walked with a limp.

Phil Johnston trudged down the dirty streets with his tired back to the cool wind; he looked like an old cripple lost among the ruins of mankind. He walked diligently through the broken glass that littered the sidewalk. "God," he said mostly to himself, "it's cold out today...damn cold." Then, as if in defiance of the wind, he turned up the collar on his coat and jammed his whitened fingers into his jean pockets. It was getting late, but his leg hurt and kept him from hurrying along too fast.

He turned onto Fifth Street, looking down at the cracks in the cement as he walked. Finally he stopped before 'Louis Bar' and peered into its front window. It was dark inside, old men and snotty boys drinking beer. He saw the flash of a cue stick and heard the sound of heavy balls cracking against one another. He started for the door, but thought better of it and decided to go home to his apartment. He felt sick and was tired from work at the factory. "Damn place anyway," he said aloud to himself, his whitened breath swirling around his pale face.

Phil crossed the frozen street, then stopped before a large brown house that creaked in the bitter November gale like a rusty hinge. The cool wind continued to howl in the haze of the fading light. Behind the clouds a cold white sun glimmered like a dying flame. Broken shutters flapped; crumbling brown leaves flew across the small, neglected yard of the house, dancing before the wind like puppets on a string. A young, lifeless elm stood in the yard looking like a frozen scarecrow reaching for the stars; a few remaining leaves clung to the tattered branches, fluttering in the unrelenting gusts like pale, frightened fingers. A door slammed; muted voices cried out; a dog barked, but was silenced by the wail of the wind--a wintry song.

Phil felt the cold in his weary, shopworn bones. He stood quietly like a statue, standing on the cracked sidewalk eyeing the ancient house. It looked like an old packing crate shuddering in the wind. It was a weathered brown with a green shingled roof. The upper floor windows were broken and streaked with dirt; a torn canvas awning sagged over the front door of the building, protecting smooth marble steps from the raging rains and blinding snows.

Phil noticed a scraggy old man sitting on the steps taking swigs from a shimmering bottle. It was Bo. Phil stared at him for a long moment, then looked to the darkening skies...his clear hazel eyes watering from the dusty wind.

"Well, are ya gonna stand there all day? Or maybe just 'til you freeze." It was Bo's scratchy voice calling to him from the front steps of the building. "Well...?"

Phil didn't reply, only moved towards the house. He walked doggedly, his tired feet shuffling through the dead brown grass of the small yard. As he passed the young elm tree, a branch snagged in his frizzy blond hair; the brittle twig snapped and he continued to walk undaunted.

"Hey, I think you look worse than I do," Bo said, taking another swig from his bottle of wine. Bo was a lonely old wino who haunted the bars and package stores of the town when he had the money. He had a wiry, iron-grey beard and brilliant blue eyes that glittered when he wasn't drunk. He wore ragged Salvation Army clothes and had a yellow scarf wrapped around his thin, bony neck.

"No one could look worse than you, Bo," Phil said as he came to a stop near the marble steps.

"How true..."

"God, it's cold out, huh?"

"I've seen it colder," he said gazing into the bottle. "I'd offer you some...but it's all I got."



It's all right," Phil said.

"Still workin' at the factory?"

"Yeah...isn't everybody?"

They didn't speak for a few moments. The wind continued to roar, swirling through Phil's hair like a raging torrent. His pale face went numb, frozen like the glossy surface of the marble steps. "How the hell can you stand this cold, Bo?"

"A man can only freeze so much..." His voice trailed off to a low moan. "I'd go inside, but you know how the old hag hates me so. Now if I had me a few bucks I could go across the street to Louis'." The old man looked wistfully across the dusty, windswept street, his fading eyes looking at the red neon sign that read 'Louis Bar'.

"Come on, Bo, I work hard for my money."

"So do I," he said simply.

Phil gazed into Bo's sorrowful face for a few minutes, hesitated, then slowly reached into his coat pocket and pulled out two dollars. "Here, it's all I can give you." He threw the money down on the steps. The wino quickly snatched them up, clutching them in his grubby little hands like they were the last he would hold for a long, lonely time.

"Thanks..." he said, shoving the crumpled money into his pants pocket. "I'll put it to good use."

"Well?" Phil said.

"Well what?"

"I thought you'd take off as soon as I gave you the money."

"I think I'll finish this first," he said, holding up the half-empty bottle. The ruby-red liquid inside sloshed, spilling from the narrow opening and splattering on Bo's chalky, weathered face.

"I'll catch you later, Bo," Phil said as he ran up the marble steps and went inside the building.

"Yeah...later."

The hallway was dim and murky, but Phil could just make out a rough, grey-haired woman standing at the top of the stairs. She stood in the shadows...waiting. Phil slowly climbed the steep, narrow staircase; he brushed his pale fingers against the yellowed wall and felt the harshness of old, peeling paint. The bare wooden steps creaked under the weight of each footstep; the empty noise echoed in the corridors. As he neared the top, he knew who it was--his landlady. "Mrs. Cranston, how are you?" he said lightly.

"Where's my money?" she squeaked, her large flabby breasts heaving as she spoke.

"You're a month overdue with the rent."

"I-I can't pay you this week...how about next Friday?" he said, his clear eyes growing duller. For some reason he still felt cold--chilled to the bone.

She stood there for a few moments, folding her huge arms. She looked like a large grumbling bear poised ready for the kill. "Goddamn you're all alike--wastin' your hard-earned money on drink and gamblin'. You're gonna end up just like that old wino who's sitting out on the steps."

"Bo's not a bad guy, just down on his luck."

The old woman grew quiet for a moment, then looked down at her slippered feet. "He's just like my husband..."

"What...dead? We're all gonna die sooner or later."

"Sooner at the rate you're going," she said.

Phil started for his room; as he brushed past the landlady, a thought occurred to him. "Hey, Mrs. Cranston, I really wouldn't talk if I were you...I've seen the empties in your garbage." Her dull brown eyes went soft for a few brief seconds, but then returned to their hard, lifeless glare. She didn't reply, just slowly turned and clomped down the creaking stairs, her heavy footsteps ringing through the silent gloom of the house.

Phil walked sluggishly to his tiny room at the end of the hallway; he hesitated at the door, fumbled for his key, then let himself in. The small, cluttered room was cold; the wind seemed to blow right through the thin, rotting walls. All was still; an electric clock hummed on the far wall, its numerals glowing red in the lurid dismalness of the silent room.

He didn't flick on the light switch, only limped across the bare wooden floor, past the ragged sofa which stood in the center of the room, and to the small kitchenette where he ate most of his quiet meals. He stopped in front of the refrigerator and opened the door; a frosty white light shone on his pale face, illuminating it like the light of a waning moon. He reached in and pulled out a golden bottle of beer. Then he smiled slyly as he gazed wistfully into the shimmering liquid; he watched the fizzy bubbles surface when he twisted off the gleaming metal cap. "This oughta go down good," he mumbled to himself, then walked over to the frayed sofa and sat down taking cool drinks from his foaming beer.

A grey, dusky light drifted in through the one dirty window that was framed on the old peeling wall behind the couch. Phil carefully set the beer down on the torn arm of the sofa and closed his weary eyes, relaxing, drifting like a cork on the stormy green seas of cool introspection. Something was gnawing at his insides, he thought, something that never let up.

There was a soft knock at the door; he heard somebody coughing out in the hallway. "Yeah... what is it?" A warm, liquid voice drifted through his mind.

"It's me...Carol."

"Carol? He thought for a moment. "Jesus, come on in." Phil stood up, rushed to the door, flicked on the lights and quickly let her in. "Hey, it's nice to see you again, Carol." They looked deep into each other's eyes for a few moments, Phil eventually turning away from her blazing green stare of bewilderment. "Come on in...make yourself at home. Phil walked over to the sofa limping; Carol followed, her smooth shapely figure swaying as she walked. They both sat down on the sofa--Phil on one end and Carol on the other.

She spoke in a calm, soothing voice. "I can only stay for a moment; I just dropped by to see how you're doing."

"See..." he said, raising his exhausted arms as if embracing the entire room.

"Things'll get better for you..." she said, looking at her shiny fingernails. He didn't reply, just nodded his weary head.

"Wow, it's been a long time, hasn't it?" Phil exclaimed as he picked up his beer and took a long, hard swallow.

"Three months...I'm married now, you know.

"Oh..." They stared at each other again, her beautiful big eyes looking perplexed.

"You seem so different, Phil," she said.

"Do I..." he said flatly. "It must be the work getting to me."

"I noticed that you're limping...how did that happen?"

"Got my leg caught in the machinery," he replied weakly, gazing into his bottle of beer.

"I'd offer you one...but it's all I've got left."

"It's all right," she said softly, her soothing voice growing weak. "I don't drink much anyway..."

"No..." he said clutching his bottle of beer tighter. The clock continued to hum, buzzing like a swarm of bees into the stillness of the icy room. Cars could be heard swishing down the dirty streets below. Silence engulfed the two waiting, wondering people.

"Well...like I said, I can only stay a moment," she uttered, breaking the hush of the room. Phil just nodded, squeezing the golden bottle tighter and tighter. Carol slowly stood up; she looked confused, perplexed about something she never understood--tears began to well up in her sparkling eyes. She went over to him and lightly kissed his cracked, pale lips. "My God... what happens to a person anyway?" she said, then quietly left the room leaving the door wide open behind her.

He could hear her footsteps echoing throughout the building; it was a hollow, lonely sound that rang in his quivering ears.

"They fade, Carol," he murmured to himself, "they fade." A sudden uncontrollable rage coursed through his burning mind. With a last desperate effort, he threw the bottle of beer with all his might against the far wall. It struck the whispering clock and knocked it down. The empty bottle fell to the bare, wooden floor and smashed into a thousand slivers of broken glass. "My God," he screamed, "I'm just like him! Why...why?..."

All grew still; Phil stood shivering in the cold, empty room. A bitter wind raced through his golden hair...an ancient gale that destroyed the unprotected. Suddenly the sound of screeching brakes rang in his ears; he heard a dull thud and a scream, one lonely scream that was lost in the wail of the city, a cry to blazing stars above.

He heard heavy feet clomping up the stairs, racing to his door. Then came the pounding, the pleading of an old grey-haired woman. "My God, come quick...Bo's been hit crossing the street! He's DEAD, I know he's dead!" She began to cry, scalding hot tears streaming down her withered face.

"Aren't we all," Phil murmured as he rose to his deadened feet, "aren't we all..." His face turned to stone, a cool swirling marble that glimmered dully in the light. Slowly, ever so slowly, he put his ragged hands to his whirling head and tore at his frizzy hair. There was a broken twig tangled in it. He pulled it out and stared at it with dark, lifeless eyes. He stood like a statue--like a tattered young elm, his pale, frightened fingers reaching for the stars...His icy heart barely stirred in the silence.

Scott E. Roth



editorial board

Scott Roth, editor-in-chief  
Mary Champion  
Mary DiNoia  
Michael Gaston  
Myles Geer  
Marsha Gonzalez  
Melanie Poirier  
Robert Shattuck  
John Zygmilewicz

Arthur Marley, adviser  
Gene Cauthen, adviser  
Marian Rahaim, typist  
Raymond LeBlanc, printer







